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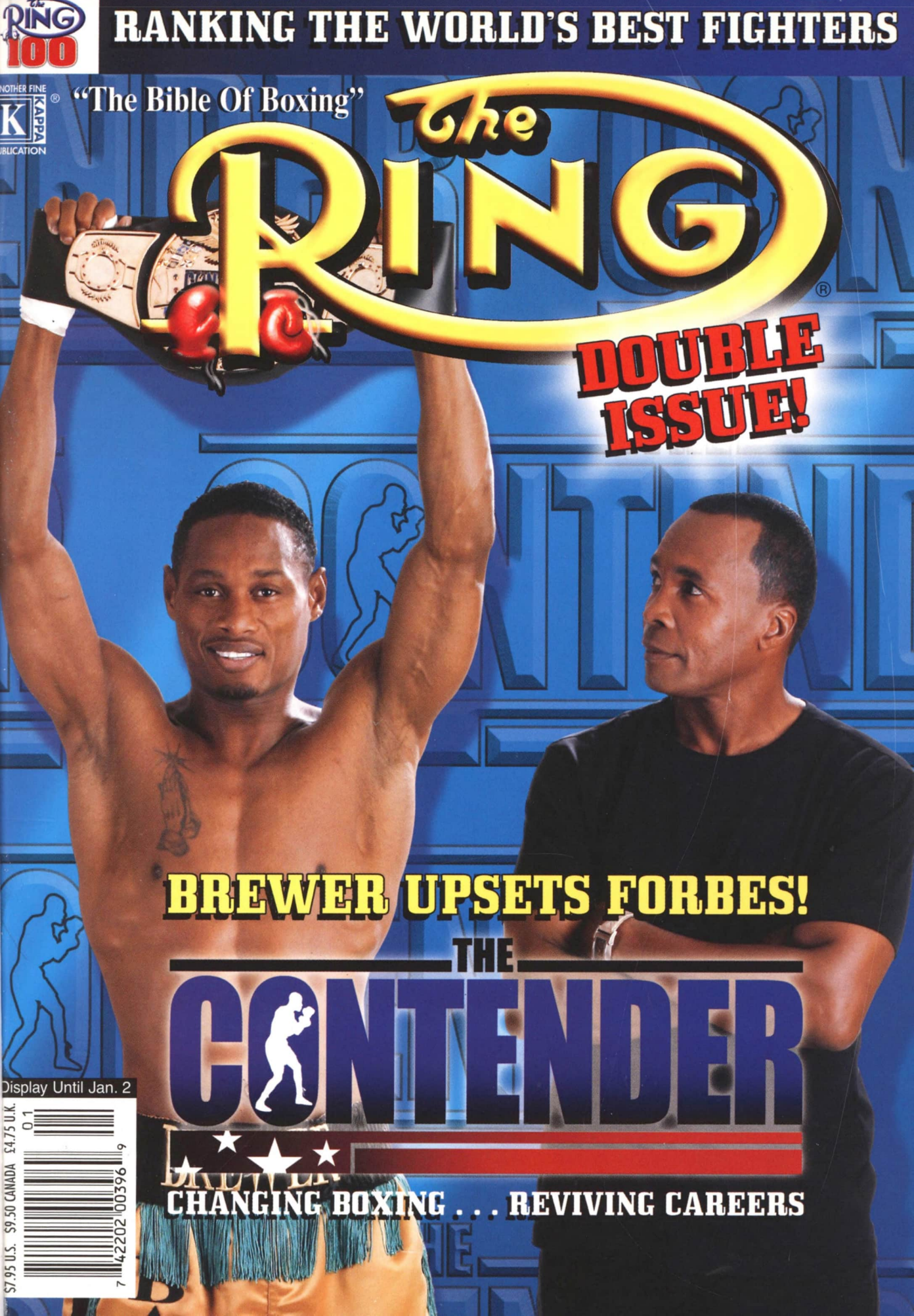

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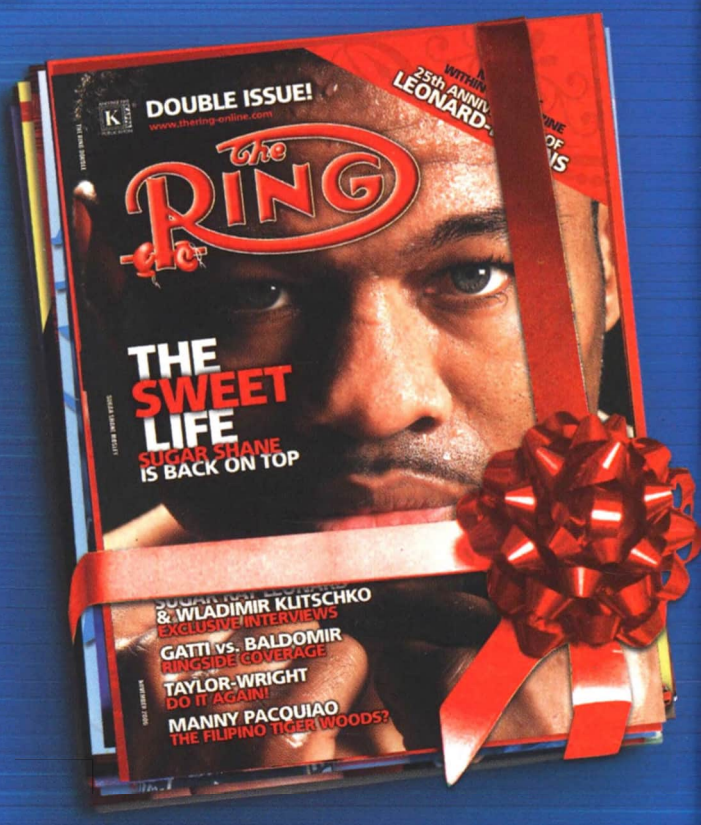

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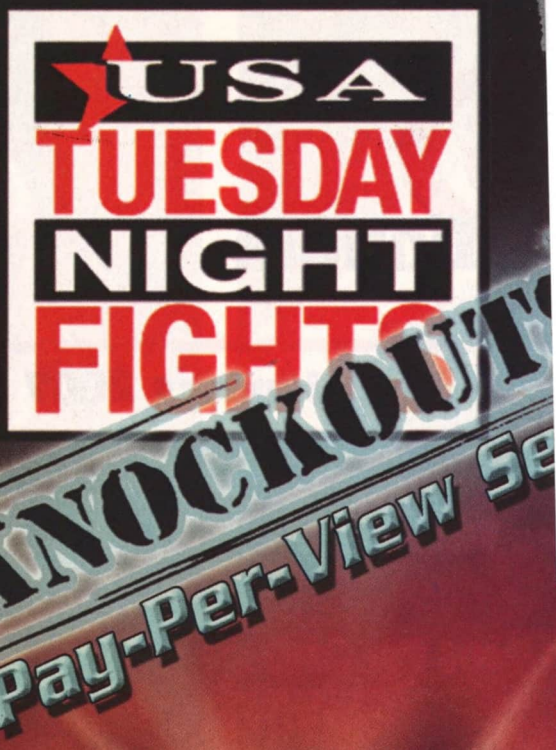

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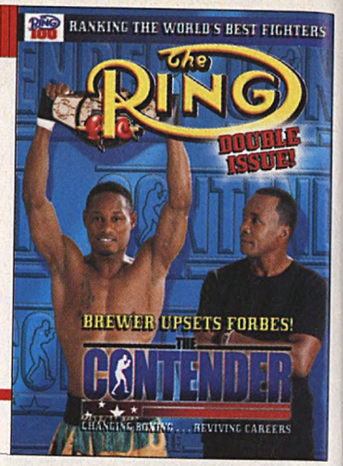
Contents

The Ring Double



January 2007

Cover Photo by **Danny Moloshok/MBP**
Cover Design by **Jim Malloy**

Features

30 A Very Un-Mexican Victory
At This Point, Barrera Is Pleased To Please Himself
By Don Stradley

38 Is The Contender Good For Boxing?
The Overall Impact Is Starting To Become Apparent
By William Dettloff

45 The Ring 100
Ranking The Best Fighters In The World
Compiled By Eric Raskin

78 Is Klitschko Too Much, Too Soon For Brock?
"In Today's Heavyweight Division, Everybody Is Ready For Everybody"
By William Dettloff

84 Junior Lightweight Kayo Artist Edwin Valero
The Most Exciting Fighter You'll Never See?
By Don Stewart

90 Clinton Woods' Rocky Road To The Top
From Street Brawler To Titleholder
By Brian Doogan

96 Boxing's Masters Of Psychological Warfare
Once The Mind Goes, The Body Will Follow
By Don Stradley

104 The Ring Update: Mustafa Hamsho
"As Long As There Is Fighting In The Middle East, It's Not Helping Us Arabs Here"
By Robert Cassidy

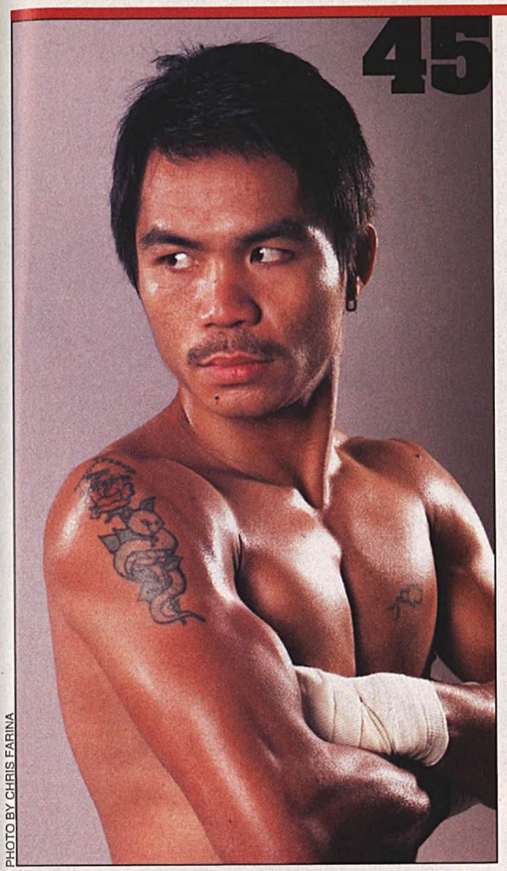
Ringside Reports

112 Fighter Of The Month & Ringside Reports

Ratings

15 Ratings Analysis

16 The Ring's International Ratings & Records



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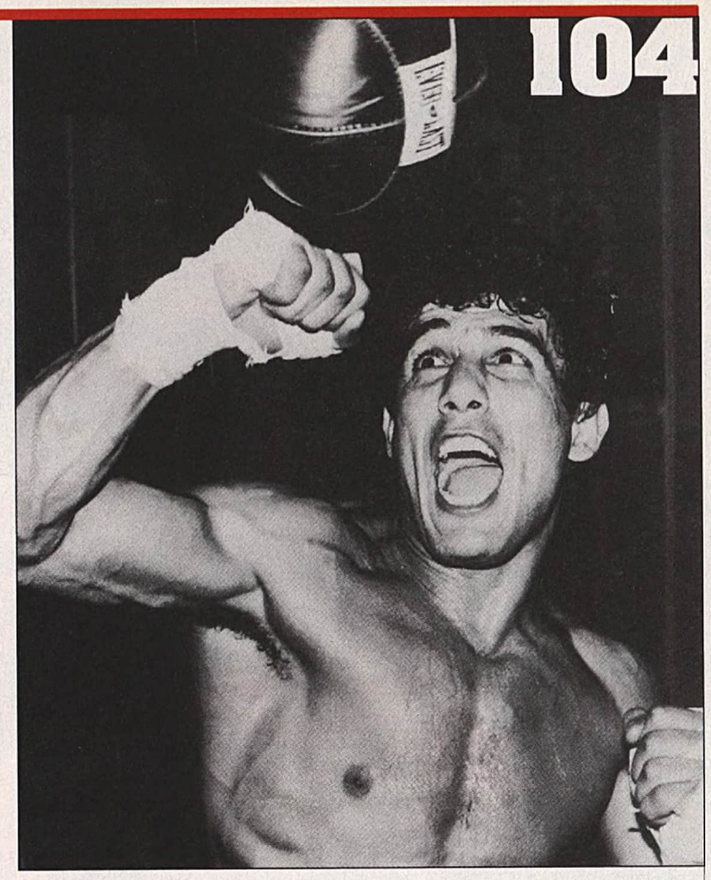

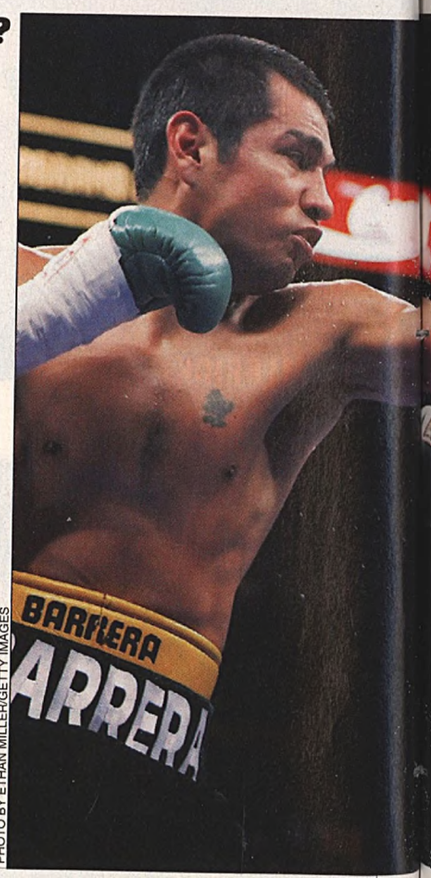

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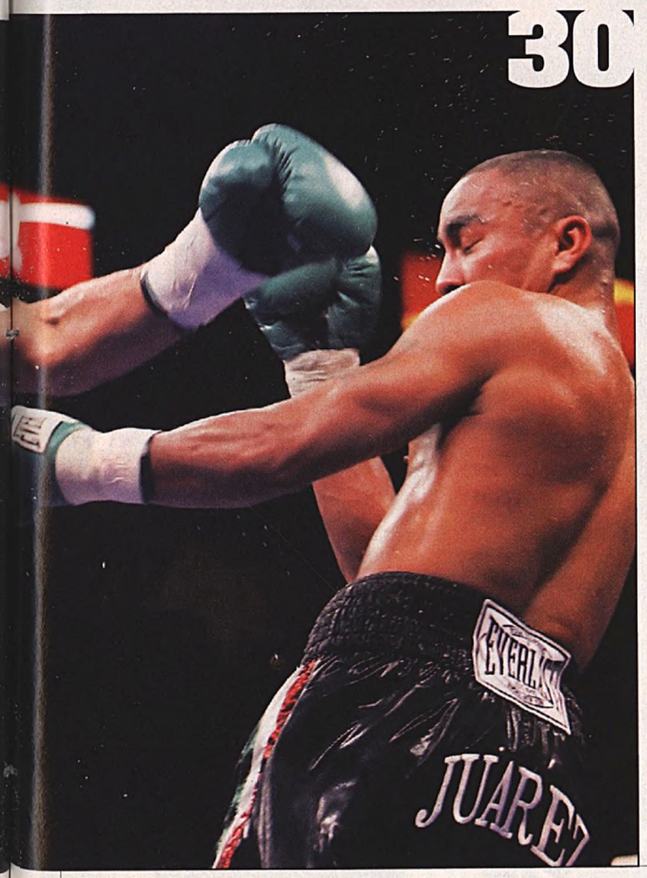

Departments

8 Ringside *by Nigel Collins*

10 Round One

18 Ryan Out Loud *by Jeff Ryan*

22 Digging Deep *by Ivan Goldman*

26 Camera Clicks

28 New Faces: Elvin Ayala
by Frank Krewda

110 Worldwide Fight Results

124 Flashback: May 1971

126 The Fight Doctor
by Margaret Goodman, M.D.

128 Come Out Writing

130 Looking Ahead *by Joe Santoliquito*

Opening Shot

Rolling with the punch

Luckily for Joan Guzman, this right-hand bomb from Jorge Barrios didn't land flush, or their junior lightweight slugfest at the MGM Grand Garden Arena might have ended then and there. But "The Hyena" only grazed his adversary, and Guzman clawed his way back to score a 12-round split decision in a corker.

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Volume 86, No. 1 January 2007

The RING
"The Bible of Boxing"

Despite what some media types would have you believe, THE RING Championship Policy does matter, and what is more, it's making a difference. True, we are fortunate to have a powerful ally in ESPN, but, by and large, it is the fans and the fighters who have been our greatest supporters.

Most readers have been in our corner from the start, but, as time passes, more and more fighters are starting to see things our way.

It has been the fighters who command the largest purses who have been the most supportive, which makes perfect sense. After all, they are the ones with the most to lose, the ones who have to fork over hundreds of thousands of dollars in so-called sanctioning fees, the ones who are forced to make mandatory defenses against undeserving challengers in matches the fans don't want to see. The ones the parasitic alphabet organizations squeeze the hardest.

Consider, for instance, the wonderful endorsement THE RING received from Oscar De La Hoya during a doghouseboxing.com interview conducted by Coyote Duran in early-August.

"THE RING magazine, first of all, with no sanctioning fees, and obviously with THE RING magazine being so prestigious and its history with boxing, I would say that it's the leader or the Number One," said De La Hoya. "I wouldn't call it an organizational body, but I would say that if you want to look up who the champion is, then go to THE RING magazine. They're the ones who can really do what no other organizational body can do, and that is bring back fans and make them aware of who the champion is."

"The Golden Boy" isn't the only major player who understands what THE RING is trying to do and believes that it is a workable alternative to the alphabet chaos that continues to denigrate boxing. In the past six months, I have received inquiries about fighting for THE RING championship from the representatives of De La Hoya, Wladimir Klitschko, Manny Pacquiao, Marco Antonio Barrera, and Clinton Woods. With the exception of Woods, these are the biggest attractions in the sport, and if they want to be on THE RING's side, we must be doing something right.

***

A few updates regarding THE RING Championship Policy:

•We have continued to list Bernard Hopkins as world light heavyweight champion despite his insistence that he is retired. But it's been less than four months since Hopkins beat Antonio Tarver for the title, and we all know how impermanent retirement can be for many fighters.

There has already been Internet chatter about B-Hop wanting to fight WBC heavyweight titleholder Oleg Maskaev, so it makes sense to keep "The Executioner" as top dog at 175, at least for a little while. But this state of affairs can't last forever. If no further bouts for Hopkins are announced in the near future, Bernard will be asked to officially relinquish THE RING title, as it would be unfair to active light heavyweights to sit on it indefinitely.

•While 175-pound title might soon be vacant, another championship void is about to be filled: Roberto Vasquez has relinquished his junior flyweight alphabet belt to compete as a full-fledged flyweight. As a consequence, Hugo Cazares and Nelson Dieppa, formerly ranked second and third, respectively, have moved up to numbers one and two. If things go as planned, the Cazares-Dieppa match, scheduled for September 30, will result in the crowning of THE RING's first-ever 108-pound champion.

Nigel Collins
Editor-in-Chief

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Vincent Bellissima
(215) 643-6385
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ADVERTISING ASSISTANT
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SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES
London Publishing Co.
P.O. Box 2029, Dept. 9
Marion, OH 43306-8129
(815) 734-1212
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The Ring (ISSN: 0035-5410), Vol. 86, No. 1, is published monthly by London Publishing Co., 6198 Butler Pike, Suite 200, Blue Bell, PA 19422. Periodicals postage paid at Blue Bell, PA 19422, and additional post offices. Postmaster: Send change of address notices to: The Ring, P.O. Box 2029, Dept. 9, Marion, OH 43306-8129. Single copy price $7.95 ($9.50 in Canada, £4.75 in U.K.). Subscription price $83.40 in the U.S., $99.00 in Canada and remaining countries. Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage. The entire contents of this magazine are copyright ©2006 London Publishing Co. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. Publisher is not responsible for the accuracy or content of any advertisements appearing in this magazine, nor the delivery or quality of merchandise or services offered. No endorsement of any such advertisement is intended or implied. Advertisers and agencies assume liability for claims arising from the content of their advertisements. FOR ADVERTISING INQUIRIES AND RATES: (215) 643-6385. U.S. and Canadian distribution by Kable Distribution Services Inc., 641 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10022. International distribution by Worldwide Media Service Inc., 115 East 23rd St., New York, NY 10010, U.K. distribution by Comag, Tavistock Rd., West Drayton, Middlesex UB77QE, England.
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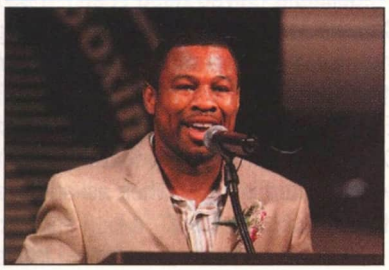


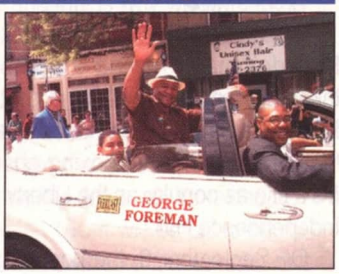
Reminiscing . . . "Sugar" Shane Mosley shares fight stories with banquet crowd.

FIST CASTING

Everlasting . . . Fist cast by Diego Corrales.

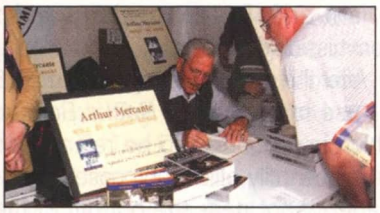
PARADE OF CHAMPIONS

Marvelous . . . Marvin Hagler waves to fans.



Hooray . . . George Foreman enjoys fans along parade route.

BOOK SIGNINGS



Hall of Fame referee Arthur Mercante signs his autobiography for the fans.

MUSEUM GROUNDS

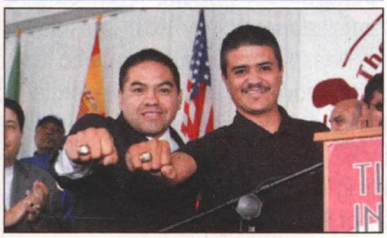
Autographs . . . "Sweet Pea" Pernell Whitaker spends time signing autographs on the Museum grounds.

5K RACE, FUN RUN

Finish Line . . . "Irish" Micky Ward in stride.

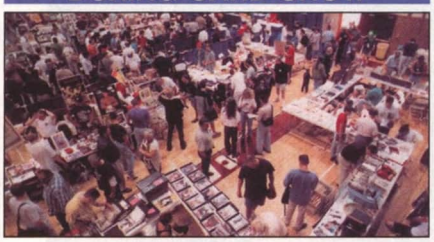
Go . . . Ken Norton officially starts race of celebrity boxers and runners.

INDUCTION CEREMONY



A Moment in Time . . . "Chiquita" Gonzalez and Michael Carbajal proudly show their Hall of Fame rings.

BOXING CARD SHOW



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GOLF TOURNAMENT

Chip . . . Gerry Cooney (l) chips onto 18th green while Sir Henry Cooper (r) is enroute to next tee.

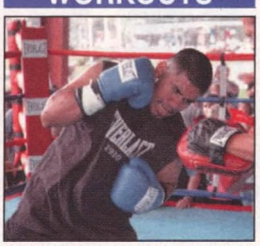
COCKTAIL PARTY

Stars . . . Boxers and fans enjoy VIP cocktail party reception.

MUSEUM

Bob Arum and Angelo Dundee point to their plaques on the Hall of Fame Wall.

WORKOUTS



Juan Diaz works the bag mitts during daily public workouts.

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Rocky Statue Back Where It Belongs

A high priority for most visitors to Philadelphia is having a photograph taken of themselves standing next to the Rocky statue with their hands raised up high like the fictional boxing character. It's a site as popular as the Liberty Bell or Independence Hall.

On September 6, the popular boxing movie character won a major decision, when Philadelphia's Art Commission voted 6-2 to move the statue back near the Philadelphia Museum of Art. For 25 years, the statue was placed outside the Spectrum, with two brief interruptions. The statue was a gift from actor Sylvester Stallone, who wrote, directed, and starred in *Rocky*, the 1976 Academy Award-winner for Best Picture.

The statue is based on the famous scene of Rocky running up the art museum steps at dawn and holding his hands aloft in celebration for finally making the long climb. The statue, which was sculpted by A. Thomas Schomberg, was unveiled in *Rocky III*.

But in 1982, the Philadelphia Art Commission rejected the idea of keeping the statue on top of the art museum steps, claiming it wasn't art. The late F. Eugene Dixon Jr., who headed the Art Commission at the time, told the city, "I hope you are jesting," when asked if the statue would stay there.

That's when the statue moved to the Spectrum, then home of the Philadelphia 76ers and Philadelphia Flyers. Since then, it's been a source of controversy in Philadelphia.

Is it art? That was what the Art Commission debated.

After the statue was removed in 2006 for use in the movie *Rocky Balboa*, which is scheduled to be released in December, city officials proposed a permanent spot near the bottom of the museum steps.

"Whether we like the particular manifestation or not, I do think it has become a cultural icon for the city," said Art Commissioner Nancy Kolb, president of the Please Touch Museum, who voted for the move. "We might have preferred that it be something else, but it isn't. It's Rocky. And, for me, that is a very compelling reason to put it back in the context of the Art Museum."

Some still opposed the move, like Commissioner Moe Brooker, a painter who told *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that "I think it is not a work of art, and for me it doesn't belong there."

The statue was moved to its new location September 8, amid a public ceremony. It was placed on a granite pedestal on the Fairmount Park property just off Kelly Drive, surrounding the art museum, about 30 yards north of the bottom museum steps.

Stallone attended a public dedication ceremony, as did Philadelphia Mayor John Street, followed by a showing of the first *Rocky* film on the museum steps.

You can almost hear the Rocky statue bellowing, *Yo, Adrian, I won!*

—Joe Santoliquito

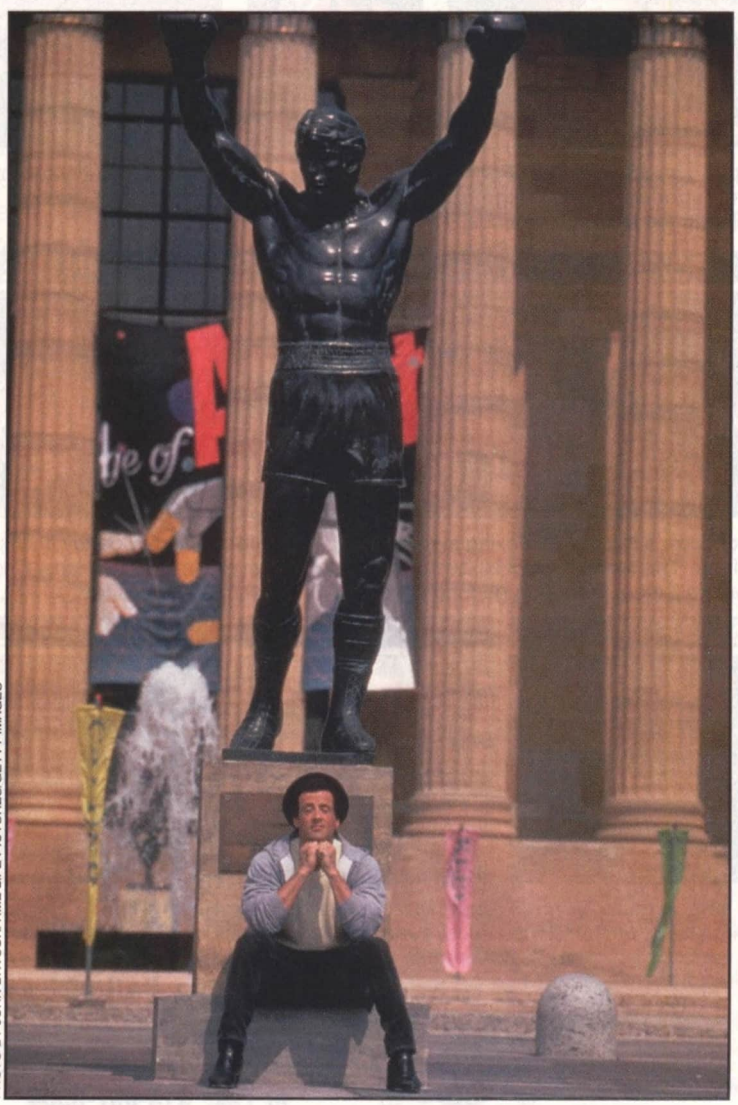


PHOTO BY JOHN BRYSON/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

The Rocky statue is back home on the Philadelphia Museum of Art grounds

Boxing's New Gold Standard

Anybody who doesn't think that Oscar De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions isn't rapidly becoming the Sweet Science's leading promotional company hasn't been paying attention. In fact, hardly a week goes by without Golden Boy adding new fighters to its roster.

While everything starts and revolves around De La Hoya, the company has expanded with the speed and power of Oscar's left hooks. There are, of course, big stars such as Marco Antonio Barrera, Shane Mosley, and De La Hoya himself. But it doesn't end there. The most recent high-profile signing was former WBA and IBF featherweight titleholder Juan Manuel Marquez. Golden Boy has even reached beyond the Americas and signed a trio of Filipinos: bantamweight Rey Bautista, junior bantamweight Z "The Dream" Gorres, and flyweight Diosdado Gabi. Moreover, popular junior featherweight contender Daniel Ponce De Leon recently re-signed a new multi-fight, multi-year contract with Golden Boy.

Then there are co-promotional deals with Sycuan Ringside Promotions, which handles world welterweight champion Carlos Baldomir and junior featherweight champion Israel Vazquez, Winky (Wright) Promotions, and Peltz Boxing, which co-promotes Kassim Ouma.

Mammoth stables are nothing new, but as some of Don King-promoted fighters have learned, it's easy to get lost in the crowd and languish through neglect. Richard Schaefer, CEO of Golden Boy Promotions, said it won't happen at Golden Boy.

"Golden Boy Promotions is a company built by the fighters for the fans," Schaefer told THE RING. "Our principals are fighters and are very sensitive and understanding to the need of fighters to stay active. It's true that we have signed a lot of talent recently, but the amount of our signings is a very small percentage of the fighters that have contacted us. Of every 10 fighters wanting to sign with Golden Boy, only about one is actually signed. Our commitment to them is to, a) keep them busy, b) maximize their earnings and potential, and, c) not only make them champions, but create superstars that will ultimately become household names. We realize that this is not an easy task, and that is why we want to be selective in who joins the Golden Boy family."

But can Golden Boy find enough TV spots to keep everybody happy?

"If you have the product, then I don't think that the TV dates will be an issue," said Schaefer. "So it will be up to us as the promoters to ensure that we can put together compelling fights that are attractive to our television partners."

With so many marquee names under one promotional banner, THE RING wondered if certain attractive matches might not be made because both fighters are under contract to Golden Boy.

"We want our fighters to have the opportunity to be able to participate in the biggest and best fights," said Schaefer. "If this includes two Golden Boy fighters fighting each other, we would not want to stand in their way. It would be up to the fighters and their management teams to accept such fights."

The only exception would be bouts between fighters such as De La Hoya, Mosley, Barrera, and Bernard Hopkins, who are all officers of the company. They would not fight each other or other fighters promoted by Golden Boy.

Nobody knows for sure what tomorrow will bring, but Schaefer is convinced that the future of boxing belongs to Golden Boy.

"Like in other sports, where baseball players want to be part of the Yankees or basketball players part of the Lakers or soccer players part of Real Madrid, I believe that we have created a company that young and more established fighters aspire to join."

—Nigel Collins

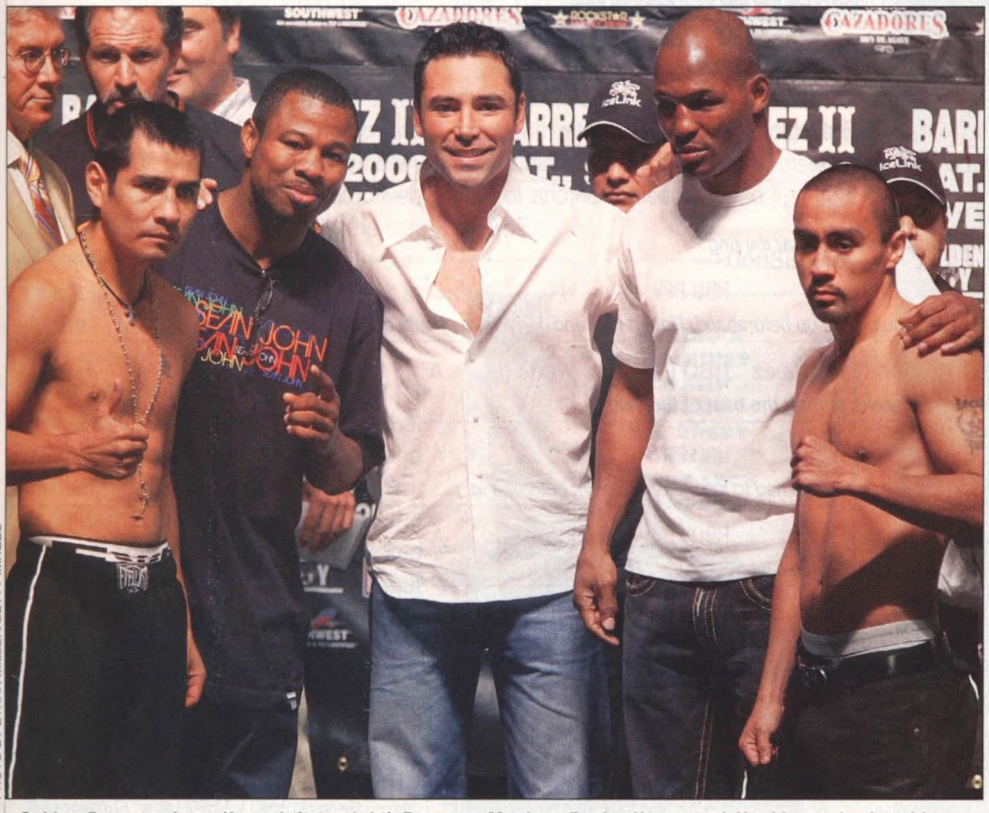


PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Golden Boy members (from left to right) Barrera, Mosley, De La Hoya, and Hopkins, who has his arm around Barrera foe Rocky Juarez

TV Fights of the Month

Date	Winner/Loser	Network	Division	Significance	Matchup	Result
8/25/06	Otis Griffin W 6 Nelson Zepeda	ESPN2	lh	C-	B	C-
Anyone else notice Griffin can't fight?						
8/25/06	Alfonso Gomez KO 8 Carson Jones	ESPN2	jm	C	B-	C+
Gomez needed an easy one after the war with Feliciano and he got it here						
8/25/06	Sergio Mora W 10 Eric Regan	ESPN2	m	C+	B+	B-
Mora's speed too much for Regan, who doesn't fight enough like a tall guy should						
8/25/06	Manuel Carnicca W 12 Carlos Maussa	Telemundo	jw	C+	B-	C
Bering awkward can take you only so far; we'll be surprised if you ever see Maussa in another big fight						
8/25/06	Ishe Smith KO 2 Oscar Gonzalez	Telefutura	jm	C	D-	C
Late replacement no match for Smith, who needs to forget The Contender *and get his career going again*						
9/1/06	Emanuel Augustus KO 8 Courtney Burton	ESPN2	jw	C+	C	C+
Raise your hand if you too were happy Burton stayed down for the full count						
9/1/06	Allan Green W 10 Emmett Linton	ESPN2	sm	B-	C+	C
Good test for Green, and if you asked us, he passed it, though not with flying colors						
9/2/06	Robert Guerrero KO 8 Eric Aiken	Showtime	f	B-	B-	C-
Guerrero not bad, but he's going to find himself in tough against the better guys at 126						
9/2/06	Samuel Peter W 12 James Toney	Showtime	h	A	B+	B-
Yes, Toney was robbed, but it's hard to feel sorry for him at 232 pounds						
9/8/06	Victor Ortiz W 8 Alfred Kotey	Telefutura	w	C+	B-	C+
That's six losses in a row for Kotey, whom we hope does this still as a labor of love						
9/8/06	Fernando Beltran ND 2 Sal Garcia	Telefutura	jf	C+	D+	D+
Since when is a cut under the eye grounds for stopping a fight?						
9/14/06	Fulgencio Zuniga W 10 Jose Luis Zertuche	OLN	m	C+	A	B-
Zertuche won this one, even if he was outhustled a bit						
9/14/06	Almazbek Raiymkulov KO 7 Jairo Ramirez	OLN	l	C	D+	C+
New rule: Kid Diamond's mother is no longer allowed near the ring						
9/16/06	Jorge Paez Jr. W 4 Derrick Campos	HBO PPV	w	C	A-	A
You couldn't make a more perfect draw if you drew it up beforehand; Robert Hall and Jerry Roth should be ashamed						
9/16/06	**Israel Vazquez KO 10 Jhonny Gonzalez**	**HBO PPV**	**World jf**	**A**	**A**	**A**
A brilliant slugfest; Vazquez' comeback ranks among the best of the year						
9/16/06	Joan Guzman W 12 Jorge Barrios	HBO PPV	jl	A	A-	B
Guzman won, but Barrios sure didn't look like a guy who had to lose a lot of weight beforehand						
9/16/06	Marco Antonio Barrera W 12 Rocky Juarez	HBO PPV	jl	A+	B+	C
Bad news for Barrera fans is Juarez let him box; Pacquiao won't						

Category Explanation: "Significance"—The importance of the bout to the division and the fighters' futures; "Matchup"—The quality of the fighters and the prefight determination of how their styles will mesh; "Result"—How the bout turned out, from the viewer's perspective.

(RING championship fights in **bold** type)

Division key: h—heavyweight; c—cruiserweight; lh—light heavyweight; sm—super middleweight; m—middleweight; jm—junior middleweight; w—welterweight; jw—junior welterweight; l—lightweight; jl—junior lightweight; f—featherweight; jf—junior featherweight; b—bantamweight; jb—junior bantamweight; fl—flyweight; jfl—junior flyweight; s—strawweight

Network key: PPV—Pay-Per-View; Show—Showtime; FOXSN—Fox Sports Net;Uni—Univision; Telef—Telefutura; Telem—Telemundo; HBO L—HBO Latino; Outdoor Life Network—OLN

Weighty Fine For Castillo

In late-August, the Nevada State Athletic Commission met to decide how to punish former lightweight champion Jose Luis Castillo for failing to make weight for his June 3 fight with Diego Corrales. Castillo and his attorney, Bill Coulthard, attended the meeting in Reno and made a presentation, and after 90 minutes of discussion and questions, the NSAC fined the boxer $250,000 and suspended him for the rest of 2006. Moreover, Castillo is not allowed to sign for a fight below 140 pounds.

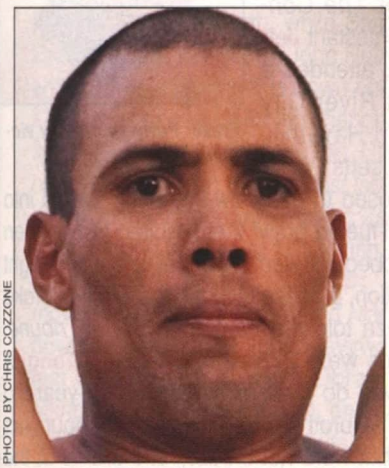


PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE

Castillo accepted his punishment graciously

The commission could have revoked Castillo's license, but handed down a lighter penalty because of the fighter's humility during the proceedings. The commission also lauded Castillo for rejecting the suggestion of a doctor to draw some of his blood in order to help him make weight.

"[Castillo] is pleased with their decision on the license issue and a little disappointed with the monetary fine, but he certainly understands the decision," Coulthard told ESPN.com.

Boxing Bookshelf

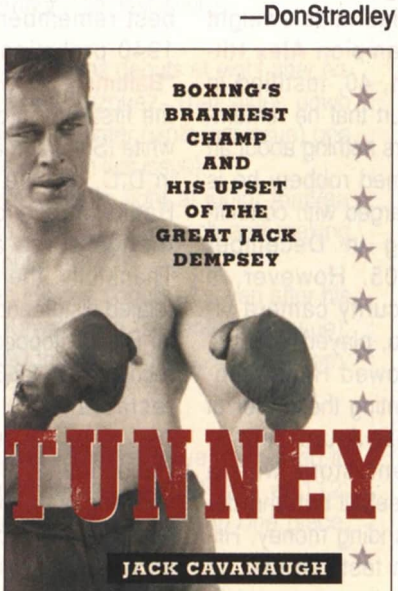
There are two types of biographies in the cable-TV universe. There are the tasteful, respectful bios aired by A&E and the History Channel. Then there's the tacky, exploitative junk shown on E! and VH1. Jack Cavanaugh's new book *Tunney: Boxing's Brainiest Champ And His Upset Of The Great Jack Dempsey* (Random House, 448 pages, hardcover, $27.95) is of the A&E variety. It's the sort of comfy, well-researched book a curmudgeon like Tunney is most likely to inspire. Too bad. Cavanaugh could've used some of VH1's tacky technique.

Tunney, although a great boxer, is such a stiff, uninteresting character that even his biographers become stiff and uninteresting when writing about him. John Jarrett tried in 2004 with *Gene Tunney: The Golden Guy Who Licked Jack Dempsey Twice*, another book that treated Tunney like he was a piece of antique furniture. (And why are the titles of these Tunney books so fruity?)

Cavanaugh's book isn't unreadable—the chapters on Dempsey and Harry Greb are fine—but on the whole, this Tunney bio is too safe and too reverential to excite anyone. Tunney's turbulent later years are ignored completely. This is a shame, because it's the bitter, alcoholic Tunney that would be more compelling.

We're not looking for a hatchet job on Tunney. We just wanted a book by someone with a willingness to dig deep and some giddy-up in his style. Instead, we got another museum piece just right for A&E.

—DonStradley



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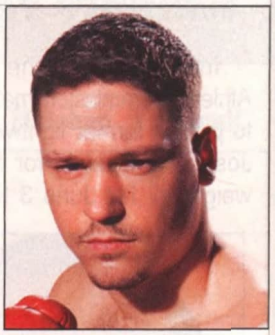
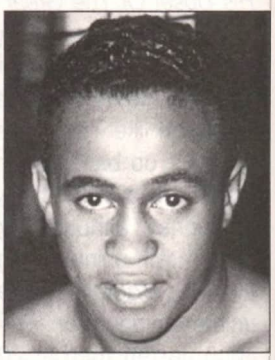
Outside the Ropes

Although neither of them currently holds a title, **Erik Morales** and **Genaro "Chicanito" Hernandez** proved that you don't have to have a belt around your waist to be a champion human being. In mid-September, both fighters visited patients at the Center for Cancer and Blood Diseases at the Children's Hospital in Los Angeles as part of a worldwide WBC program. "It is sad, but at the same time it is of great importance to come to see these children that are struggling for their lives, and, in all truth, everything I saw touched me profoundly," said Morales. Hernandez was also moved and said, "Battles in the ring do not compare with the situation of these sick children" ... Former lightweight contender **Phillip Ndou**, 29, has a new career as an actor in his native South Africa. He has garnered a role in a TV drama called *Muvhango* in which he portrays the owner of a gym. Ndou was already working as a commentator of SABC 2 boxing program *Blow By Blow* ... On September 21, the Atlantic City City Council honored former WBC lightweight titleholder **Leavander Johnson**, who died of injuries suffered in his September 2005 bout with **Jesus Chavez**. The ceremony included the unveiling of a plaque and the renaming of the gym where Johnson trained. A fund has been established for Johnson's children. Those wishing to make donations can do so by writing a check payable to "The Leavander Fund" and mailing it to The Leavander Fund, c/o DiBella Entertainment, 350 Seventh Avenue, Suite 800, New York, NY 10001 ... Undefeated junior welterweight champion **Ricky Hatton** was mugged by a gang of thugs while visiting Shanghai, China, and robbed of an expensive Rolex watch. Apparently, Hatton had become separated from a group of friends on his way back to his hotel following a night of drinking ... In late-August, former Canadian middleweight champion **Alex Hilton**, 40, testified in court that he remembers nothing about an armed robbery he is charged with committing in December 2005. However, a security camera video, played in court, showed Hilton confronting the owner of Sept Jours department store with a baseball bat and demanding money. Hilton testified that he had been on a drinking binge at the time because of his recent divorce, and felt bad about what happened at the store. Hilton's trial will resume in December ... After being eliminated from the second season of *The Contender*, contestant **Jeff Fraza**, 28, attended a tribute at River City Billiards in Haverhill, Massachusetts. What was supposed to be a low-key affair turned into an alcohol-fueled brawl that resulted in two men being stabbed. "It went from being a good night of celebration, a peaceful night, then all hell broke lose," Fraza told the *Lawrence Eagle-Tribune*. The victims were 27-year-old **Michael Tang**, a former national tae kwon do champion, and his 22-year-old brother, **David Tang**. The brothers have worked as bouncers at the bar in the past, but were not on duty at the time of the incident. "Everyone is a suspect," said Detective Sgt. **John Arahovites** ... Former middleweight **Jimmy Lester**, 62, died of a heart attack on September 9 at the Alameda (California) Care Center. Born in San Francisco, the hard-hitting "Bayview Blaster" turned pro in February 1963 and quickly became a Bay Area favorite. He gained contender status with wins over **Denny Moyer** (W 10), **Florentino Fernandez** (KO 2), **Charley Scott** (KO 1), and **Charley Austin** (KO 10), but by 1970 he was losing more fights than he won. Lester, who never got a title shot, retired in '73 with an overall record of 41-20-3 (31), and worked for the San Francisco Police Department for 10 years ... Former lightweight **Billy Banks**, 85, died of lung cancer on August 31 in Washington, D.C. Banks, who campaigned professionally from 1938 until '49, is best remembered for his June 1940 preliminary bout against **"Baltimore" Joe Sole**, which was the first ever pro fight between a white (Sole) and a black boxer held in D.C. Unsure what to expect, Banks had a couple of white friends serve as bodyguards. Thankfully, there were no race-related disturbances, and the popular Banks stopped Sole in the sixth round. After retiring with a record of 51-32-3 (15), Banks owned or managed bars and restaurants ... Former Yonkers welterweight **Roger Donoghue**, 75, succumbed to Alzheimer's disease in August. Donoghue, 27-4-1 (17), retired from the ring shortly after knocking out **George Flores,** who died five days after the fight, and pursued a career in television and movies. He is best known for teaching actor **Marlon Brando** how to box for the movie *On The Waterfront*.

Ndou: Garners acting gig



Fraza: Party spoiled by violence



Banks: Dead at 85

Quotable

"Ricky Hatton's always been a thorn in my side, and I want to rip it out and squash it."

—WBC super lightweight titleholder Junior Witter, attempting to rile world champion Hatton into fighting him

"Brock has not fought a contender, anybody close to being a contender, or anybody on a first-name basis with a contender."

—Tom Sorensen, sportswriter for The Charlotte-Observer*, wondering how hometown hero Calvin Brock obtained a shot at WBC heavyweight titleholder Wladimir Klitschko*

[Ratings Analysis]

For Period Ended September 20, 2006

Heavyweights: Samuel Peter leaps from eighth to third based on his controversial points victory over James Toney (third last issue). The change pushes Toney to fourth, while Sergei Liakhovich (fourth last issue), Lamon Brewster (fifth last issue), John Ruiz (sixth last issue), and Calvin Brock (seventh last issue) each slide down one place.

Cruiserweights: No changes.

Light heavyweights: Clinton Woods' controversial split-decision over Glen Johnson (second last issue) moves him from fifth to third. The loss drops Johnson to fourth, moving Zsolt Erdei (third last issue) to second. Roy Jones (fourth last issue) falls to fifth.

Super middleweights: Danny Green (fourth last issue) exits to move to light heavyweight and Manny Siaca (sixth last issue) exits as he is now campaigning at light heavyweight. The changes move Jeff Lacy (fifth last issue) up one, while Librado Andrade (seventh last issue), Mger Mkrtchian (eighth last issue), and Lucian Bute (ninth last issue) all move up two places. Allan Green debuts at nine and Mario Veit enters at 10.

Middleweights: No changes.

Junior middleweights: No changes.

Welterweights: Ricky Hatton (fourth last issue) opted to return to junior welterweight, moving up Luis Collazo (fifth last issue), Kermit Cintron (sixth last issue), Oktay Urkal (seventh last issue), Arturo Gatti (eighth last issue), Paul Williams (ninth last issue), and Carlos Quintana (10th last issue) one rung each. Joshua Clottey enters at 10.

Junior welterweights: Carlos Maussa (fourth last issue) exits after an upset loss to journeyman Manuel Garnica, moving everyone from fifth to 10th up one slot and making room for Cesar Rene Cuenca to debut at 10.

Lightweight: Isaac Hlatshwayo (seventh last issue) departs to campaign at junior welterweight. That moves up David Diaz (eight last issue) and Aldo Rios (ninth last issue) one place. Juan Carlos Diaz debuts at ninth.

Junior lightweights: Joan Guzman enters at four, after his impressive victory over Jorge Barrios (fourth last issue). Everyone rated fourth and lower moves down one, pushing out Alex Arthur (10th last issue).

Featherweights: No changes.

Junior featherweights: Jhonny Gonzalez debuts at eight after his strong showing against world champion Israel Vazquez. That slides down Takalani Ndlovu (eighth last issue) and Michael Hunter (ninth last issue) one place each and forces out Daisuku Yamanaka (10th last issue).

Bantamweights: Jhonny Gonzalez exits to fight at junior featherweight, moving everyone up from third to 10th one slot each and making room for Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym to enter at 10.

Junior bantamweights: Cristian Mijares debuts at seven after his close-decision victory over Katsushige Kawashima (seventh last issue). Everyone rated seventh and below slides down one place, forcing Gerry Penalosa out.

Flyweights: No changes.

Junior flyweights: Roberto Vasquez (first last issue) is moving to flyweight and will be ranked in that division when he fights at 112. Vasquez' exit moves everyone from second through nine up one place, making room for Omar Salado at 10.

Strawweights: No changes.

Pound-for-pound: No changes.

The RING®
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Pound-For-Pound

1. **Floyd Mayweather**
   Welterweight
2. **Winky Wright**
   Middleweight
3. **Manny Pacquiao**
   Junior Lightweight
4. **Jermain Taylor**
   Middleweight
5. **Bernard Hopkins**
   Light Heavyweight
6. **Marco Antonio Barrera**
   Junior Lightweight
7. **Rafael Marquez**
   Bantamweight
8. **Ricky Hatton**
   Junior Welterweight
9. **Jose Luis Castillo**
   Junior Welterweight
10. **Joe Calzaghe**
    Super Middleweight

For weekly updated Ring ratings, go to **TheRing-online.com**

The Ring Ratings

For Period Ended September 20, 2006

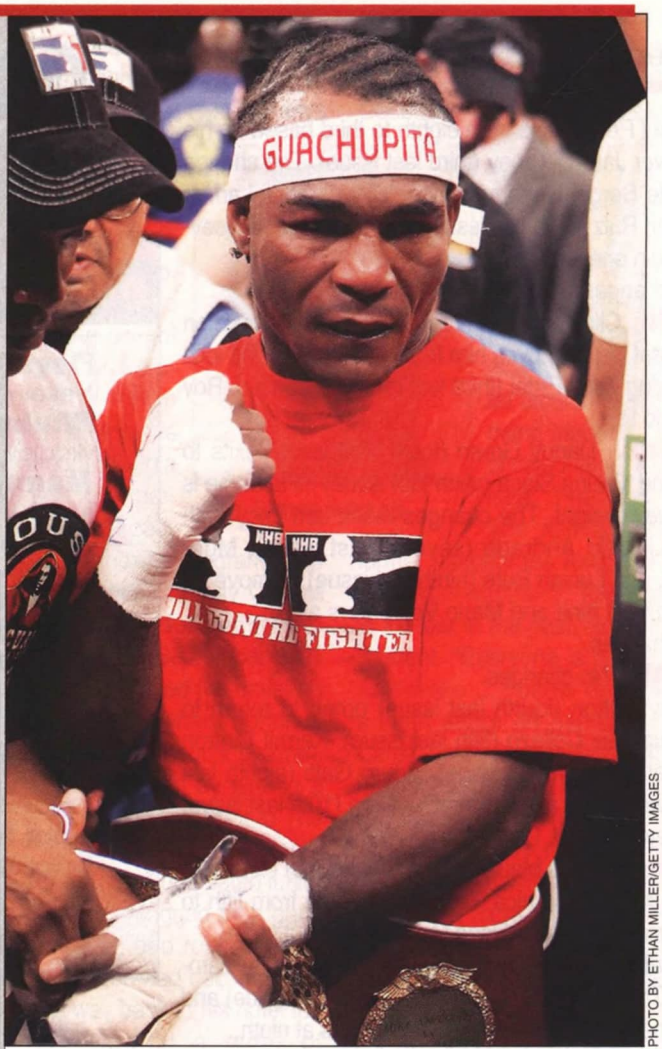


PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Joan Guzman debuts at four at junior lightweight after beating Jorge Barrios

How Our Ratings Are Compiled

Fighters recognized as champions by The Ring are rated at the top of their division, with the top 10 contenders listed below.

Championship vacancies can be filled by winning a box-off between The Ring's number-one and number-two contenders, or, in certain instances, a box-off between our number-one and number-three contenders.

The only three occasions when a fighter will lose his championship status are when he retires, moves to another weight division, or is defeated in a championship bout.

Ratings By The Editors

For weekly updated Ring ratings, go to

TheRing-online.com

Heavyweights

Weight Unlimited

Champ: Vacant

1. **WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO** Ukraine 46-3 (41)
2. **OLEG MASKAEV** Staten Island, NY 33-5 (26)
3. **SAMUEL PETER** Las Vegas, NV 27-1 (22)
4. **JAMES TONEY** Ann Arbor, MI 69-5-3 (43)
5. **SERGEI LIAKHOVICH** Belarus, 23-1 (14)
6. **LAMON BREWSTER** Los Angeles, CA 33-3 (29)
7. **JOHN RUIZ** Methuen, MA 41-6-1 (28)
8. **CALVIN BROCK** Charlotte, NC 29-0 (22)
9. **NICOLAY VALUEV** Russia 44-0 (32)
10. **HASIM RAHMAN** Baltimore MD 41-6-2 (33)

Jr. Middleweights

Weight Limit: 154 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **SHANE MOSLEY** Pomona, CA 43-4 (37)
2. **CORY SPINKS** St. Louis, MO 35-3 (11)
3. **ROMAN KARMAZIN** Russia 34-2-1 (21)
4. **KASSIM OUMA** W. Palm Beach, FL 25-2-1 (15)
5. **SERGEI DZINDZIRUK** Germany 31-0 (21)
6. **OSCAR DE LA HOYA** Los Angeles, CA 38-4 (30)
7. **FERNANDO VARGAS** Oxnard, CA 26-4 (22)
8. **VERNON FORREST** Atlanta. GA 38-2 (28)
9. **IKE QUARTEY** Ghana 37-3-1 (31)
10. **VERNO PHILLIPS** Aurora, CO 40-10-1 (21)

Featherweights

Weight Limit: 126 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **CHRIS JOHN** Indonesia 38-0-1 (20)
2. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ** Mexico 45-3-1 (34)
3. **HUMBERTO SOTO** Mexico 39-5-2 (23)
4. **RODOLFO LOPEZ** Mexico 19-2-1 (13)
5. **TAKASHI KOSHIMOTO** Japan 39-1-2 (17)
6. **INJIN CHI** South Korea 30-3-1 (18)
7. **SCOTT HARRISON** Scotland 25-2-2 (14)
8. **SPEND ABAZI** Denmark 32-1 (10)
9. **HIROYUKI ENOKI** Japan 25-0-1 (18)
10. **NICKY COOK** England 26-0 (15)

Jr. Featherweights

Weight Limit: 122 pounds

Champ: ISRAEL VAZQUEZ Mexico 41-3 (31)

1. **SOMSAK SITHCHATCHAWAL** Thailand 46-1-1 (37)
2. **CELESTINO CABALLERO** Panama 24-2 (17)
3. **RICARDO CORDOBA** Panama 28-1-1 (19)
4. **SERGIO MANUEL MEDINA** Argentina 25-0 (15)
5. **GABULA VABAZA** South Africa 23-0-1 (5)
6. **STEVE MOLITOR** Canada 22-0 (8)
7. **DANIEL PONCE DE LEON** Mexico 29-1 (26)
8. **JHONNY GONZALEZ** Mexico 33-5 (28)
9. **TAKALANI NDLOVU** South Africa 26-3 (17)
10. **MICHAEL HUNTER** England 26-0-1 (12)

Bantamweights

Weight Limit: 118 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **RAFAEL MARQUEZ** Mexico 36-3 (32)
2. **HOZUMI HASEGAWA** Japan 20-2 (7)
3. **VEERAPOL SAHAPROM** Thailand 51-3-2 (36)
4. **WLADIMIR SIDORENKO** Ukraine 19-0-1 (6)
5. **SILENCE MABUZA** South Africa 19-2 (15)
6. **GENARO GARCIA** Mexico 35-4 (20)
7. **RATANACHAI VORAPIN** Thailand 67-9 (44)
8. **IRENE PACHECO** Colombia 32-1 (24)
9. **SIMONE MALUDROTTU** Italy 23-1 (9)
10. **POONSAWAT KRATINGAENGGYM** Thailand 25-1 (16)

Cruiserweights

Weight Limit: 200 pounds

Champ: O'NEIL BELL
Atlanta, GA 26-1-1 (24)

1. **GUILLERMO JONES**
Panama 33-3-2 (26)
2. **STEVE CUNNINGHAM**
Philadelphia, PA 19-0 (10)
3. **JEAN-MARC MORMECK**
France 32-3 (22)
4. **JOHNNY NELSON**
England 45-12-2 (29)
5. **WAYNE BRAITHWAITE**
Guyana 21-2 (17)
6. **PIETRO AURINO**
Italy 34-2 (16)
7. **DAVID HAYE**
England 17-1 (16)
8. **KRZYSZTOF WLODARCZK**
Poland 36-1 (27)
9. **VADIM TOKAREV**
Russia 22-0-1 (15)
10. **GRIGORY DROZD**
Russia 25-0 (20)

Light Heavyweights

Weight Limit: 175 pounds

Champ: BERNARD HOPKINS
Philadelphia, PA 47-4-1 (32)

1. **ANTONIO TARVER**
Orlando, FL 24-4 (18)
2. **ZSOLT ERDEI**
Hungary 25-0 (15)
3. **CLINTON WOODS**
England 40-3-1 (24)
4. **GLEN JOHNSON**
Miami, FL 44-11-2 (29)
5. **ROY JONES**
Pensacola, FL 50-4 (38)
6. **TOMASZ ADAMEK**
Poland 30-0 (21)
7. **JULIO GONZALEZ**
Huntington Beach, CA 40-3 (24)
8. **PAUL BRIGGS**
Australia 25-2 (18)
9. **HUGO GARAY**
Argentina 26-2 (13)
10. **CHAD DAWSON**
New Haven, CT 23-0 (15)

Super Middleweights

Weight Limit: 168 pounds

Champ: JOE CALZAGHE
Wales 41-0 (31)

1. **MIKKEL KESSLER**
Denmark 37-0 (28)
2. **MARKUS BEYER**
Germany 34-2-1 (13)
3. **ANTHONY MUNDINE**
Australia 26-3 (20)
4. **JEFF LACY**
St. Petersburg, FL 21-1 (17)
5. **LIBRADO ANDRADE**
Mexico 24-0 (18)
6. **MGER MKRTCHIAN**
Armenia 23-2 (17)
7. **LUCIAN BUTE**
Canada 17-0 (16)
8. **CARL FROCH**
England 19-0 (15)
9. **ALLAN GREEN**
Tulsa, OK 22-0 (15)
10. **MARIO VEIT**
Germany 28-2 (23)

Middleweights

Weight Limit: 160 pounds

Champ: JERMAIN TAYLOR
Little Rock, AR 25-0-1 (17)

1. **WINKY WRIGHT**
St. Petersburg, FL 50-3-1 (25)
2. **ARTHUR ABRAHAM**
Germany 21-0 (17)
3. **JAVIER CASTILLEJO**
Spain 61-6 (41)
4. **SAM SOLIMAN**
Australia 32-8 (13)
5. **FELIX STURM**
Germany 25-2 (11)
6. **EDISON MIRANDA**
Colombia 26-0 (23)
7. **AMIN ASIKAINEN**
Finland 18-0 (14)
8. **SEBASTIAN SYLVESTER**
Germany 22-2 (10)
9. **KINGSLEY IKEKE**
Canada 23-2 (13)
10. **SCOTT DANN**
England 24-2 (17)

Welterweights

Weight Limit: 147 pounds

Champ: CARLOS BALDOMIR
Argentina 43-9-6 (13)

1. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER**
Grand Rapids, MI 36-0 (24)
2. **ANTONIO MARGARITO**
Mexico 33-4 (24)
3. **ZAB JUDAH**
Brooklyn, NY 34-4 (25)
4. **LUIS COLLAZO**
Queens, NY 26-2 (12)
5. **KERMIT CINTRON**
Reading, PA 26-1 (24)
6. **OKTAY URKAL**
Germany 37-3 (11)
7. **ARTURO GATTI**
Jersey City, NJ 40-8 (31)
8. **PAUL WILLIAMS**
Augusta, GA 31-0 (23)
9. **CARLOS QUINTANA**
Puerto Rico 23-0 (18)
10. **JOSHUA CLOTTEY**
Ghana 29-1 (18)

Jr. Welterweights

Weight Limit: 140 pounds

Champ: RICKY HATTON
England 41-0 (30)

1. **MIGUEL COTTO**
Puerto Rico 27-0 (22)
2. **JOSE LUIS CASTILLO**
Mexico 54-7-1 (47)
3. **JUNIOR WITTER**
England 34-1-2 (19)
4. **VIVIAN HARRIS**
Brooklyn, NY 27-2-1 (18)
5. **LOVEMORE NDOU**
Australia 43-8-1 (28)
6. **DeMARCUS CORLEY**
Washington, D.C. 31-5-1 (17)
7. **JUAN LAZCANO**
El Paso, TX 36-3-1 (27)
8. **SOULEYMANE M'BAYE**
France 35-1 (20)
9. **DEMETRIUS HOPKINS**
Philadelphia PA 24-0-1 (10)
10. **CESAR RENE CUENCA**
Argentina 26-0 (1)

Lightweights

Weight Limit: 135 pounds

Champ: DIEGO CORRALES
Las Vegas, NV 40-3 (33)

1. **JUAN DIAZ**
Houston, TX 30-0 (15)
2. **JOEL CASAMAYOR**
Miami, FL 33-3-1 (21)
3. **JULIO DIAZ**
Coachella, CA 33-3 (24)
4. **ACELINO FREITAS**
Brazil 38-1 (32)
5. **ZAHIR RAHEEM**
Las Vegas, NV 27-2 (16)
6. **JESUS CHAVEZ**
Mexico 42-3 (29)
7. **DAVID DIAZ**
Chicago, IL 32-1-1 (17)
8. **ALDO RIOS**
Argentina 41-4 (9)
9. **JUAN CARLOS DIAZ**
Spain 31-0 (16)
10. **RAMAZAN PALYANI**
Philadelphia PA 14-0-1 (8)

Jr. Lightweights

Weight Limit: 130 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Philippines 42-3-2 (32)
2. **MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA**
Mexico 63-4 (42)
3. **ERIK MORALES**
Mexico 48-4 (34)
4. **JOAN GUZMAN**
Dominican Republic 26-0 (17)
5. **JORGE BARRIOS**
Argentina 46-3-1 (33)
6. **ROCKY JUAREZ**
Houston, TX 26-3 (18)
7. **EDWIN VALERO**
Venezuela 20-0 (20)
8. **VICENTE MOSQUERA**
Panama 24-2-1 (12)
9. **YODSANAN NANTHACHAI**
Thailand 46-3-1 (37)
10. **CARLOS HERNANDEZ**
Bellflower, CA 41-6-1 (24)

Jr. Bantamweights

Weight Limit: 115 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **MASAMORI TOKUYAMA**
North Korea 32-3-1 (8)
2. **NOBUO NASHIRO**
Japan 8-0 (5)
3. **MARTIN CASTILLO**
Mexico 30-2 (16)
4. **LUIS PEREZ**
Nicaragua 24-1 (15)
5. **FERNANDO MONTIEL**
Mexico 32-2-1 (24)
6. **ALEXANDER MUNOZ**
Venezuela 28-2 (26)
7. **CRISTIAN MIJARES**
Mexico 28-3-2 (11)
8. **KATSUSHIGE KAWASHIMA**
Japan 30-5 (20)
9. **HAWK MAKEPULA**
South Africa 28-3 (18)
10. **JOSE NAVARRO**
Los Angeles, CA 23-2 (10)

Flyweights

Weight Limit: 112 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **PONGSAKLEK WONJONGKAM**
Thailand 62-2 (32)
2. **LORENZO PARRA**
Venezuela 27-0 (17)
3. **VIC DARCHINYAN**
Australia 26-0 (21)
4. **JORGE ARCE**
Mexico 44-3-1 (34)
5. **OMAR NARVAEZ**
Argentina 22-0-2 (15)
6. **BRAHIM ASLOUM**
France 20-1 (7)
7. **TAKEFUMI SAKATA**
Japan 28-3-1 (13)
8. **VICTOR BURGOS**
Mexico 39-14-3 (22)
9. **LUIS MALDONADO**
Mexico 33-1-1 (25)
10. **DAISUKE NAITO**
Japan 29-2-2 (19)

Jr. Flyweights

Weight Limit: 108 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **HUGO CAZARES**
Mexico 23-3-1 (17)
2. **NELSON DIEPPA**
Puerto Rico 23-2-2 (13)
3. **ULISES SOLIS**
Mexico 22-1-2 (16)
4. **KOKI KAMEDA**
Japan 12-0 (10)
5. **OMAR NINO**
Mexico 24-2-1 (10)
6. **BRIAN VILORIA**
Waipahu, HI 19-1 (12)
7. **WILL GRIGSBY**
St. Paul, MN 18-3-1 (7)
8. **JOSE AGUIRRE**
Mexico 34-5-1 (20)
9. **NOBUAKI MASUDA**
Japan 22-3-1 (3)
10. **OMAR SALADO**
Mexico 14-0-2 (7)

Strawweights

Weight Limit: 105 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **IVAN CALDERON**
Puerto Rico 26-0 (6)
2. **YUTAKA NIIDA**
Japan 20-1-3 (8)
3. **MUHAMMAD RACHMAN**
Indonesia 51-7-4 (23)
4. **EAGLE KYOWA**
Japan 16-1 (6)
5. **KATSUNARI TAKAYAMA**
Japan 17-2 (7)
6. **OMAR SOTO**
Mexico 14-3-1 (10)
7. **DANIEL REYES**
Colombia 37-4-1 (30)
8. **RODEL MAYOL**
Philippines 23-1 (18)
9. **ISAAC BUSTOS**
Mexico 24-8-3 (13)
10. **ERIBERTO GEJON**
Philippines 21-1-1 (13)

[Ryan Out Loud]

By Jeff Ryan

Tough To Tolerate

About a month before Mike Tyson's knockout of Larry Holmes in 1988, "Kid Dynamite" and I sat in the microscopic dressing room of a rec center in South Jersey, talking about Holmes' chances for survival. Tyson, despite the huge odds in his favor, said he was expecting a tough battle. The then-heavyweight king explained that his former trainer and mentor, Cus D'Amato, had always warned him that an aging legend was capable of recapturing his greatness one more time if the circumstances were right.

Or, as country singer Toby Keith puts it in his hit song, an old-timer may not be as good as he once was, but he might be as good *once* as he ever was.

Proof that's true comes this month, when "Ryan Out Loud" dusts off an old column topic by taking a look at the most annoying people in boxing. While compiling the list, it occurred to me that it wasn't just the subject matter that was being dusted off, but some of the annoying people as well. If an aging legend can turn back the clock to rediscover his jab, perhaps, too, a faded pain in the ass can rediscover his ability to irritate the hell out of me, even if only for a brief period of time.

So without further delay, here is the new (and somewhat old) list of the most irritating SOBs in the world of TKOs and PPV:

James Toney: He's a surefire first ballot selection for the Annoyance Hall of Fame after a career full of antics that range from calling his female former manager a "ho" during a radio interview to testing positive for steroids. What lands him on my list, though, is his having become one of the most boring big-name fighters in the game.

Now *that's* annoying.

As a heavyweight, Toney possesses just enough tools and lacks just enough natural size to make for really dull fights.

PHOTO BY DONALD MIRALLE/GETTY IMAGES

Toney couldn't kayo Peter, but he put Ryan to sleep

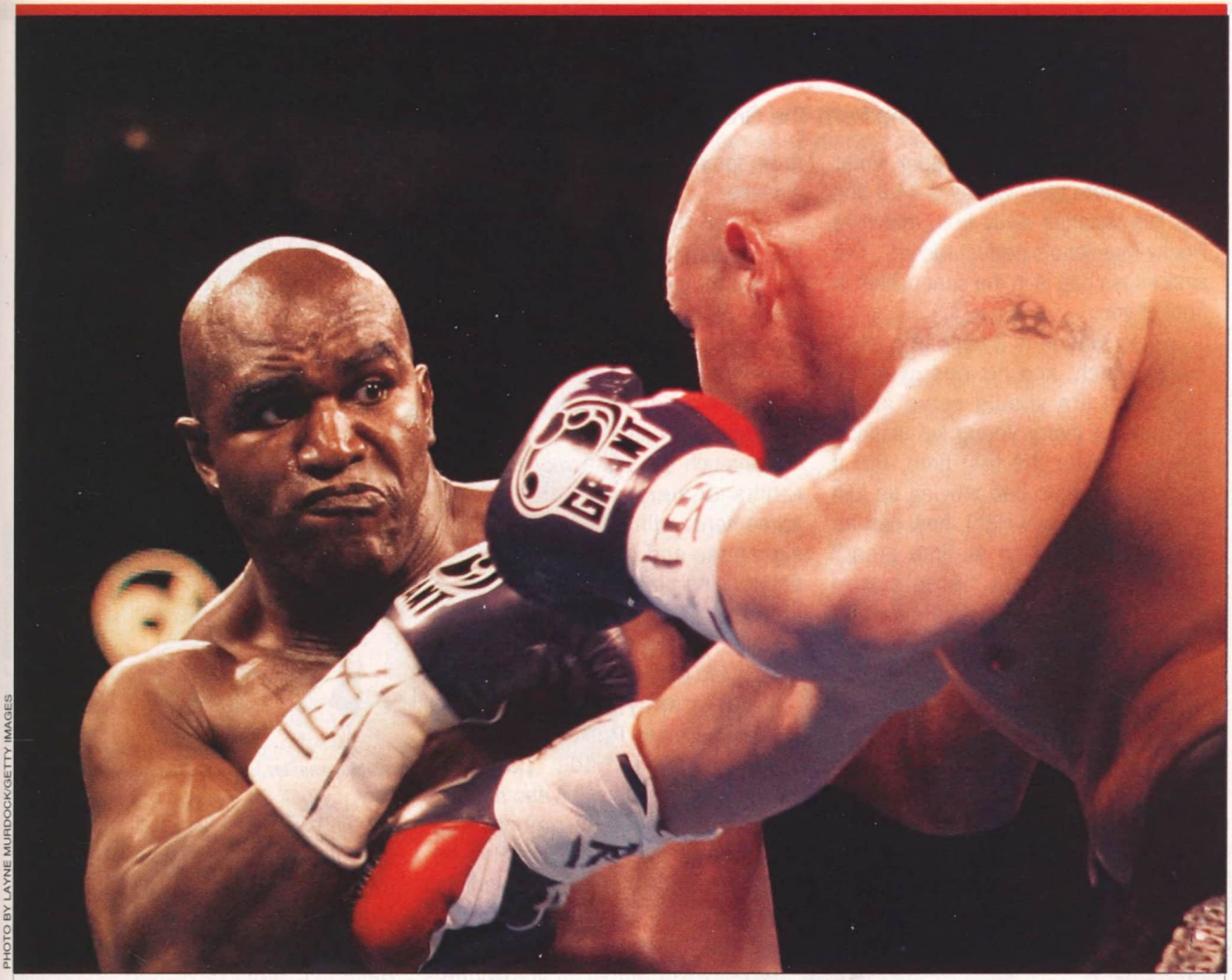


PHOTO BY LAYNE MURDOCK/GETTY IMAGES

Holyfield's delusional quest continued against Jeremy Bates

Those of us who are knockout-lovers (not to mention knockout lovers, as well, but that's a whole other story), sit down at a Toney bout knowing that he doesn't hit hard enough to stop anyone except a decrepit Evander Holyfield. Meanwhile, Toney's combination of defensive skills and chin assure he's not going down and out either. And because he's carrying around too much blubber, those distance fights are never going to be pretty exhibitions of slickness and movement.

"Lights Out" is a most fitting nickname. By the sixth round, many of us are already out like a light. Zzzz.

Mike Tyson: When "Leg-iron Mike" said he was sick of boxing and didn't want to ever fight again, some of us made the foolish assumption that we wouldn't ever be seeing him between the ropes again. Then he showed up at the Aladdin in Las Vegas recently, sparring with trainer Jeff Fenech and training for ... basically nothing.

Tyson was set up in a ring off the casino as basically a novelty act. Sort of like Evel Knievel doing wheelies all day for the fans with no intention of ever attempting a jump. The ex-champ talked about maybe fighting some exhibitions, but made no commitment. And he said nobody should feel sorry for him having to resort to being a sideshow attraction in order to make a few bucks. Don't worry, Mike. Considering all the millions you've pissed away through the years, you're not in any danger of getting my sympathy.

Perhaps Tyson has a future as a full-time worker-outer. Like Celine Dion or Barry Manilow, who perform night after night for a year or two at a time, he can make the Aladdin his home. Tourists can play some blackjack, grab a drink, dig into a steak, and then pick up tickets for the 7 p.m. heavybag show. Is there a two sports drink minimum?

Evander Holyfield: He fights at the age of 44 not because he's hungry for more money, but because this maniac truly believes that he's got a chance to be the undisputed heavyweight ruler again. Let's humor him for a second and assume that he can beat all of the alphabet beltholders. How long does he think it would take to arrange all of those unification fights? By the time he tied up the last loose end, "The Real Deal" would be accepting birthday greetings from Willard Scott.

The story of Holyfield, who says he'll be champ again in 2008, would be less pitiful if he *was* broke and desperate because at least he'd have a better excuse than pure stubbornness for risking his health and image. Doesn't the fact that the man was banned from competing in New York State tip him off to the reality that he's lost a foot or two—or maybe 60 feet—off his fastball?

Personal Perceptions:

The last word on everything from The Great White Hope to The Great White Way:

•One New York newspaper writer actually wrote that "Valuev is 44-0 and just five victories away from matching Rocky Marciano's perfect record." The airsickness bag is in the seat pocket in front of you.

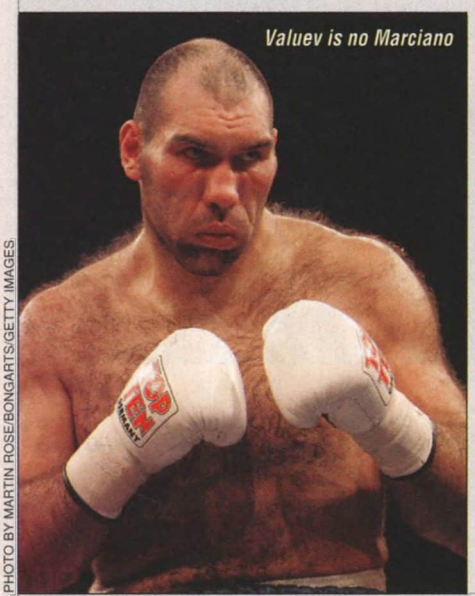
•Ricky Hatton is a heck of a lot of fun to watch, and his energy level, guts, and fire should serve as an example to every young kid walking into a gym for the first time. But if Hatton looked so bad moving up just seven pounds in weight, how can he ever hope to be an all-time great? These days, some fighters who aren't even stars prove themselves to be forces in at least two weight classes.

•What made Showtime think that we wanted to see boobs who know nothing about boxing, but were deemed worthy of camera time because they're stars of Showtime original programs, be interviewed during the Toney-Samuel Peter card?

•In much the same way memorabilia dealers sign exclusive agreements with athletes for their signatures and mementos, some enterprising plastic surgeon ought to lock up the rights to do work on Hatton, Arturo Gatti, and Manny Pacquiao after they retire.

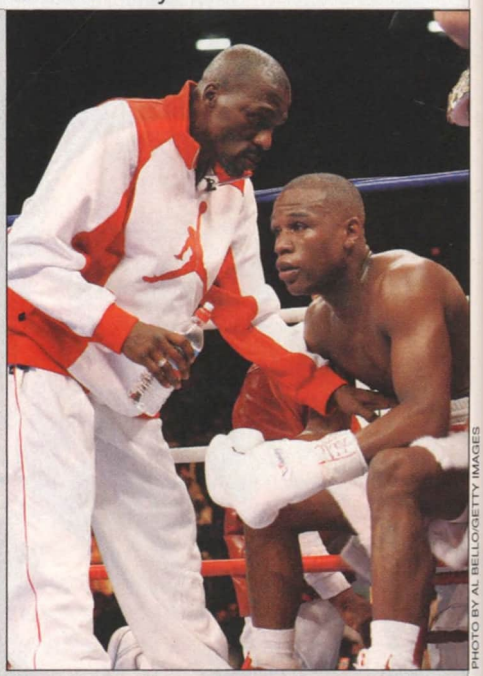
•Apparently, THE RING Championship Policy needs to make more inroads. Lately, there's been all this talk about there being four Russian heavyweight kings. Well, a glance at THE RING ratings shows me only one: Vladislav Vacant.

•Now that Jay Larkin, the former executive producer of Showtime's boxing telecasts, has left the network to start a Broadway production company, don't be surprised if you see him cast Steve Albert and Al Bernstein in another remake of *The Odd Couple*.



Valuev is no Marciano

PHOTO BY MARTIN ROSE/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES



Which Mayweather is the most dangerous?

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

•With Roger Mayweather serving that one-year suspension for entering the ring during nephew Floyd Mayweather's bout with Zab Judah, "Pretty Boy's" next opponent, Carlos Baldomir, must have had an easier time focusing on his battle plan during those late-night strategy sessions. Whenever he was told something like, "You have to trap Mayweather on the ropes," Baldomir didn't have to ask, "Which Mayweather?"

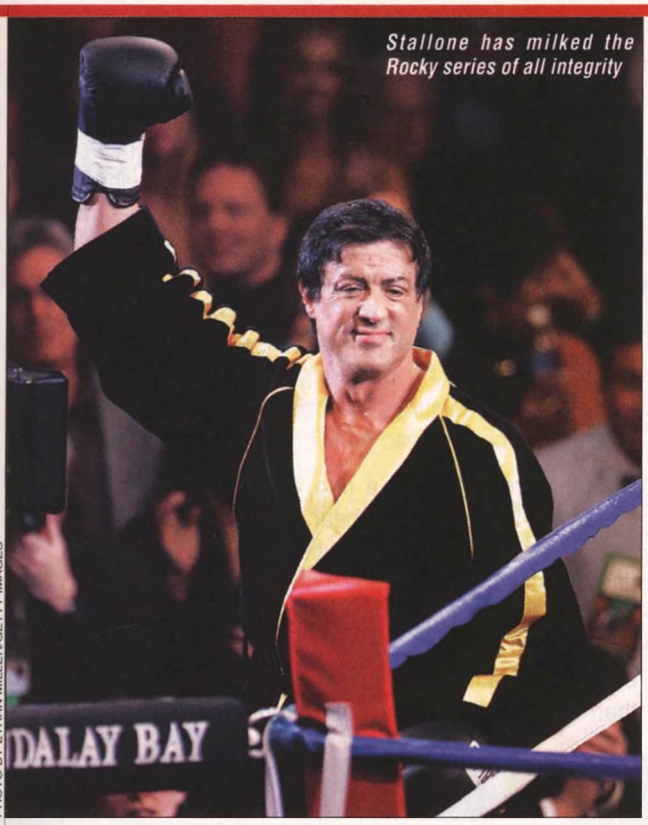
Don King: The good thing about a sport like tennis is that there are no Don Kings around to ruin, *uh*, run things. That's why the sight of the bombastic promoter at the U.S. Open in August scared many people worse than the notoriously insane prices at the concession stands. Knowing the egomaniacal D.K., he probably stopped by the King National Tennis Center because he mistakenly thought they'd just renamed the place after him and not Billie Jean. Actually, King was there to hype WBA heavyweight champ Nicolay Valuev. Lots of crossover appeal between boxing and tennis, apparently.

Never one to let truth get in the way of hoopla, King claimed that sexy and talented baseliner Maria Sharapova was Valuev's girlfriend. King, though, didn't refer to her as Sharapova. He called her "Maria What's-Her-Name from Russia, yes, the blonde." When asked about the relationship, Valuev explained that he met Sharapova exactly once.

One of the great things about going to a tennis match was that there was always no threat of bumping into a Don King or a heavyweight with more body hair than the entire cast of *Planet Of The Apes*. Oh, well. There goes the neighborhood.

Antonio Tarver: Starring in *Rocky VI* must have confused him. When he fought Bernard Hopkins, Tarver stood around like he was waiting for a director to tell him when to throw punches and a choreographer to decide when he should slip them. It's too bad Tarver didn't treat the prefight interview sessions like a silent movie and keep his flapping lips sealed, especially if he wasn't going to back up his vow of violence.

Jermain Taylor: This guy has more close escapes than David Blaine. Forgive me, but isn't the middleweight champion—think Robinson, Zale, LaMotta, Graziano, Hagler,



Stallone has milked the Rocky series of all integrity

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Hopkins—supposed to be a blood-and-guts tough guy? Geez, bridal showers don't feature as many card readings as Taylor's title reign has.

Wladimir Klitschko: When one of your biggest wins requires three climbs off the canvas, you're the kind of softee who really gets on my nerves.

Sylvester Stallone: For having the nerve to dilute an *Academy Award winner for Best Picture* with a vanity project called *Rocky VI*, Stallone should be sentenced to 10 years of directing public service announcements, Emergency Broadcasting System tests, and those cheesy car dealership commercials that air at 2 a.m.

Imagine *The Sound Of Music VI*, or *The Deer Hunter VI*, or *Rain Man VI*. If Stallone had been entrusted with *Million Dollar Baby*, we would have probably already seen a sequel. In *Million Dollar Baby II* (or *Two Million Dollar Baby*, if they called it that), Hilary Swank's exhumed skeleton would have been propelled across the ring toward Laila Ali in the climactic fight scene.

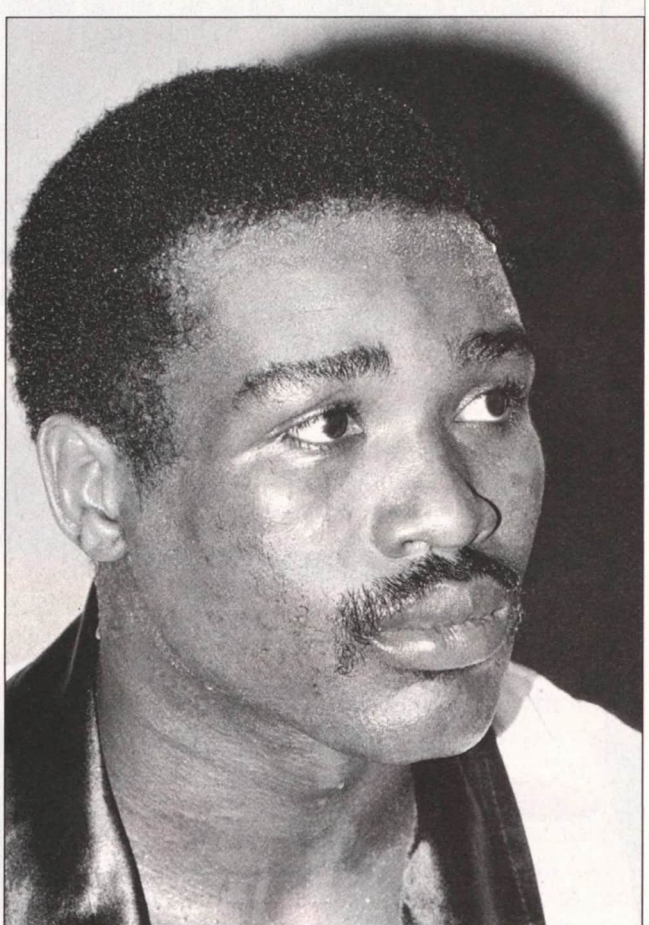
Just Excuse Yourselves: When it comes to presenting an inviting target for criticism, the ESPN Classic program, *The Top Five Reasons You Can't Blame* ... routinely sticks out its chin, drops its hands to its waist, and stands as stationary as the Statue of Liberty. Simply put, the show keeps finding new ways to top itself in the stupidity department. It's a good thing it limits its nutty premise—making (mostly feeble) excuses for the goats of the sports world—to fun and games and doesn't venture into hard news. Just imagine if it did ...

"Up Next, The Five Reasons You Can't Blame Al Qaeda For 9-11"

Two recent installments convinced me the show is becoming a self-parody. One attempted to absolve 25-year-old, unbeaten, 4-1 favorite George Foreman of any responsibility for his loss to 32-year-old Muhammad Ali in Zaire. The other gave a free pass to the bigger, stronger, harder-hitting, 11-year-unbeaten-streak-sporting Marvin Hagler for dropping a decision to a Sugar Ray Leonard who had a surgically repaired retina and had fought just once (quite unimpressively) in the previous five years.

Among the reasons Foreman's sense of responsibility was given a Get Out of Jail Free Card were—get this—his being put under a spell by an African witch doctor (or, at least, his being convinced that happened), and his corner having no answer for Ali's rope-a-dope strategy. (As if a fighter's complete inability to adapt during battle isn't his fault in the least.) And why does Hagler get to slide? Well, among other reasons, because Leonard held him and hit him on the break (golly gee, poor little Marvin got picked on by the big bully). And because John "The Beast" Mugabi's strong showing against Hagler a year earlier gave Leonard confidence. That's right, *Mugabi's* to blame.

To go so far as to say that *The Top Five Reasons You Can't Blame ...* doesn't belong on television wouldn't be fair. The show certainly does have a place on the tube. That place is Comedy Central, though, not ESPN Classic. ■



Was Mugabi responsible for Leonard's victory over Hagler?

By Ivan Goldman

Joe Louis, Mike Tyson, And Geronimo

Years ago, when Caesars Palace kindly rescued the great Joe Louis from the edge of homelessness, it fashioned him a job as "greeter." Much of his duties involved schmoozing high rollers on the golf course and elsewhere around the casino property.

A variation of Louis' fate was, as I wrote this, playing itself out down the Vegas Strip at the Aladdin. There, another former heavyweight champ, bankrupt, beaten Mike Tyson, was stepping around inside a ring, hitting the pads for casual observers like a dancing bear. Whether this was more or less demeaning than Louis' duties is difficult to measure. The answer would vary from one individual to another. Louis was a pretty easygoing fellow, so his Caesars job probably wasn't hard on him. Tyson, on the other hand, is not an easygoing fellow. His situation is less analogous to Louis' than to the twilight years of Geronimo, the fierce Apache

PHOTO BY RICK GUZMAN

Like Louis (above), Tyson (pictured with Jeff Fenech) has been reduced to casino sideshow status

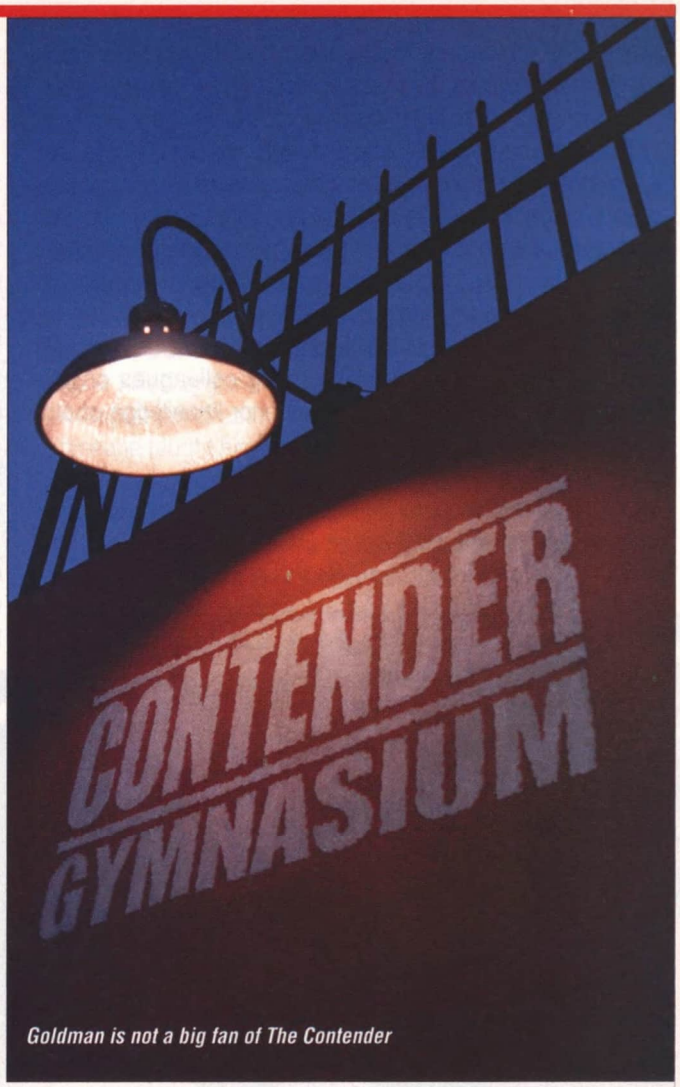
chief who wound up selling souvenirs and photos at fairs.

Most people in service industries know they should pretend they like it even when they don't. So the waiter says he'll be happy to fetch the Dijon for the rude customer. But plain-speaking Mike has a number of bad habits that don't go down well in polite society, and among them is his tendency to tell the truth. He made it pretty clear to interviewers that he despised his work at the Aladdin.

But a crappy job generally beats none at all, and Tyson's isn't so terrible. Try describing his troubles to grunts stepping around corners in Baghdad for $1,500 a month—or senior flight attendants at Northwest Airlines who took a 30 percent pay cut last year and were being asked to accept a 40 percent cut on top of that.

It's too bad Tyson entrusted his money to con men and pissed away the rest. But his chores involve healthy exercise, he's not dead or in prison, and he doesn't have to put on a wrestling cape. All in all, it could be a lot worse, as he fully understands. Let Tyson gripe. That's part of what keeps him going, and also part of why he can still attract a crowd.

The former baddest man on the planet is aging more gracefully than his nemesis, the wealthy Evander Holyfield. Only two things distinguish Holyfield from your average babbling homeless guy pushing a shopping cart. One, he's got a bank account. Two, he's licensed to fight in Texas.



Goldman is not a big fan of The Contender

PHOTO BLUE PIXEL ™ 2006 JMBP INC.

The Contender Conundrum: A friend watched Shane Mosley punch some poor *Contender* contender into little pieces during a sparring match and wondered why Sugar Shane, a likable man, didn't give the kid some kind of break. The answer is, Mosley had no choice.

Every time a world-class fighter spars with an unknown, he's aware the guy might try to make a name for himself by lulling him into a dance and then murdering him. But when that sparring partner is also one of *The Contender* fighters, there's a much bigger chance the fighter might try to pull a fast one. These kids wouldn't make the cut for the show if they didn't lust for wealth and fame. Only last year one of them tried to put Sugar Ray Leonard in the hospital. With cameras and witnesses all around, Sugar Shane did what he had to do.

And now on to other *Contender* business. First, we're all aware the show attracts plenty of new fans to the Sweet Science, so why won't I ignore its perfumey, show-biz misdemeanors and give the show's poor, downtrodden, multimillionaire producers a break? Maybe because those amplified *thumps* they add to the sound of punches landing are like the squeals of 40 fingernails across a televised blackboard. That's why. Their bag of glitzy tricks is similar to those of the sound engineers who are somehow supposed to disguise the mediocrity of Madonna's voice. A good fight doesn't need this kind of technical meddling, and a bad fight will be a bad fight even if you rig up a 155 mm howitzer as accompaniment.

To appreciate a good novel, movie, or fictional TV show, there's a necessary ingredient called suspension of disbelief. We know that's a TV screen, but our brain allows us to suspend our understanding and pretend along with the actors. When *The Contender* adds sound effects to magnify the sound of a punch and plays rousing music to pump everything up even more, it has the opposite effect. That is, the inserted sounds intrude on the knowledge that we're watching an actual fight and make reality appear to be made up. But that's the drill in reality programming, which scrambles scripted drama and truth into a blender.

As for the show's condensing fights by editing out lulls, that might be almost legitimate if this meddling were made clear to viewers. Just say something like, "The contest you are about to see has been edited so it can achieve an APE (amplified phony excitement) rating." Then we could accept it as another form of sports highlights on the 11 o'clock news, fast-forwarding through all the spitting, scratching, and foul ball chasing to the ninth-inning triple that won the ballgame.

Of course, the point of the show isn't the fight, but the raw emotion, the drama going on outside the ropes that's a fortified version of the old up-close-and-personal Olympics coverage that used to have viewers throwing up all over their living rooms. I find this largely unobjectionable because there

the reality-show theatricality doesn't mess with the sport itself the way editing the matches does.

However, I do object to herding human beings—especially fighter human beings—into a dormitory kennel and showering them with a series of on-camera rewards and punishments, especially when contestants' roles are to jump up and down with outsized gratitude for their digital cameras and designer ties. It's all got a Jerry Springer ring to it. Perform tricks or be gone.

Plenty of knowledgeable fight people have been drawn into this sappy soap opera, including colleagues on this magazine. But I've never let the superior knowledge of others deter me before, so why start now?

Magoo 1: Because he was the more effective puncher in a majority of rounds, Kassim Ouma deserved his unanimous decision victory over Sechew Powell in Madison Square Garden. But Dick Flaherty's score of 100-90 was a dazzling display of ineptitude. Powell deserved at least three rounds, which is why Tony Paolillo and Steve Weisfeld had it 96-94 and 97-93, respectively.

Magoos 2, 3, 4: More trouble on the same card. Paolillo and Weisfeld joined with Melvina Latham to snatch a well-earned victory from hard-luck Ike Quartey with scores of respective scores of 96-93, 95-94, and 95-94 for the wrong fighter, Vernon Forrest. Forrest's punches weren't effective enough to give him the close rounds, but he got them anyway. Because referee Arthur Mercante Jr. took a hasty point from Forrest for a low blow in round nine, that meant Paolillo saw seven rounds for Forrest minus the deduction, a score that was about as plausible as the three *Mission Impossible* movies.

Magoo 5: To the New York State Athletic Commission. Notice that Paolillo and Weisfeld performed well in the co-feature, but the witless commission left them in there 10 more rounds without a break. You don't keep

PHOTO BY NICK LAHAM/GETTY IMAGES

No way Powell (left) didn't win a single round against Ouma

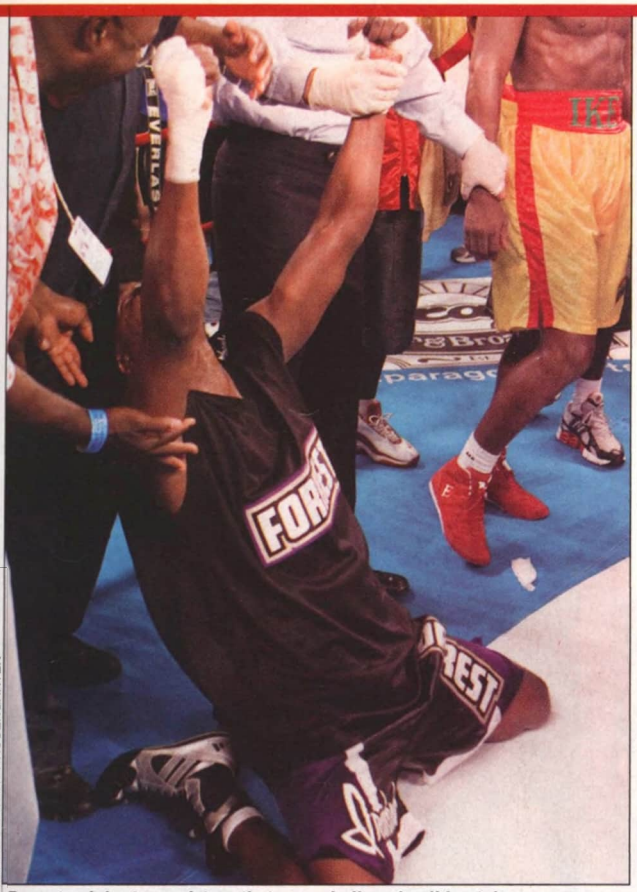


PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Forrest celebrates a victory that many believe he did not deserve

the same pitcher on the mound for both games of a doubleheader.

Magoo 6: Precisely four weeks after turning in his outrageous score in New York, Flaherty flew out to Los Angeles, where, along with Alejandro Rochin of Mexico and California, he vandalized the heavyweight division by scoring it 116-111 for Samuel Peter over James Toney, handing victory to the wrong fighter. Often a crummy score is defensible in some way. This one wasn't. Sharp punches to the head and body outweigh clubbing, illegal shots to the back of the head, neck, and shoulders.

Flaherty made history. He's the first official to be zapped in the same column for two separate fights. The man should find a wagon, a sighted driver, and ride into the sunset—ride anywhere, as long as it's not near a boxing ring. I scored it 115-112 for Toney as did judge Gale Van Hoy of Texas. Later I scored it again off TV, where I gave Peter all the close rounds just to see how it would come out. He got six. Minus his one-point foul, he still came out a loser.

Magoo 7: Rochin, for reasons spelled out in Magoo 6.

Magoo 8: Referee Raul Caiz. The point he deducted from Peter was for banging Toney with both gloves on a break, but the rabbit punches to the brain stem were barely addressed. And because he seldom flashed signals, the fans rarely had any idea what Caiz was up to. Lots of times, neither did he.

Magoo 9: Peter. He makes foul-master Joel Casamayor look like humanitarian sportsman of the year. Peter winds up and bangs people behind the head round after round. It's his meal ticket. Afterward, the TV guys stick a microphone in his face and he thanks God for the victory.

Maybe one of these fights he'll pull a referee who actually referees, but the way things are going, that's unlikely. He hasn't killed anyone yet mostly because he doesn't throw leveraged punches. I shudder to think what might happen if someone taught him to fight.

Without officials to keep Peter in line, what's needed is a slick heavyweight who can punch holes in him and send him off to do penance. Where have you gone, Muhammad Ali? The nation turns its lonely eyes to you. ■

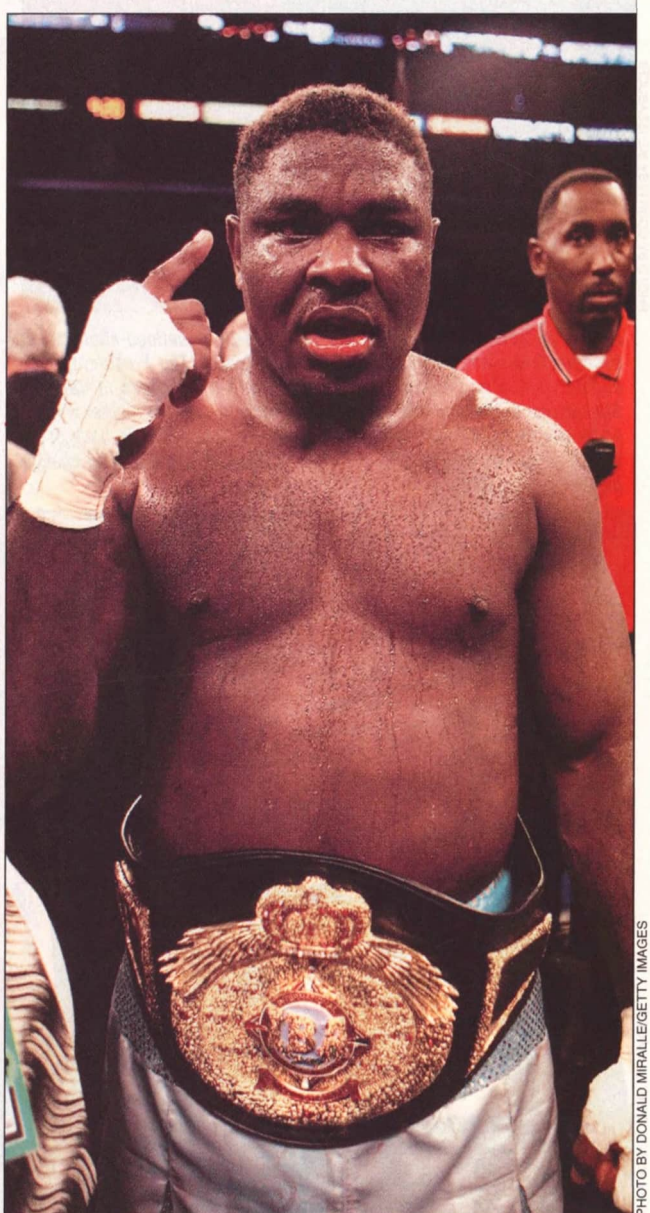


PHOTO BY DONALD MIRALLE/GETTY IMAGES

Is this man a dirty fighter?

Camera Clicks

PHOTO BY COURTESY IKE IBEABUCHI

It's not an official prerequisite that you have to be college-educated to become President, but it generally helps, so Ike "The President" Ibeabuchi went ahead and earned himself associate degrees in General Studies and Business while serving time in prison, and his mother was on hand for graduation day. Unfortunately for Ibeabuchi, you do have to be American-born to be President, and that's not something he can change just by studying hard.

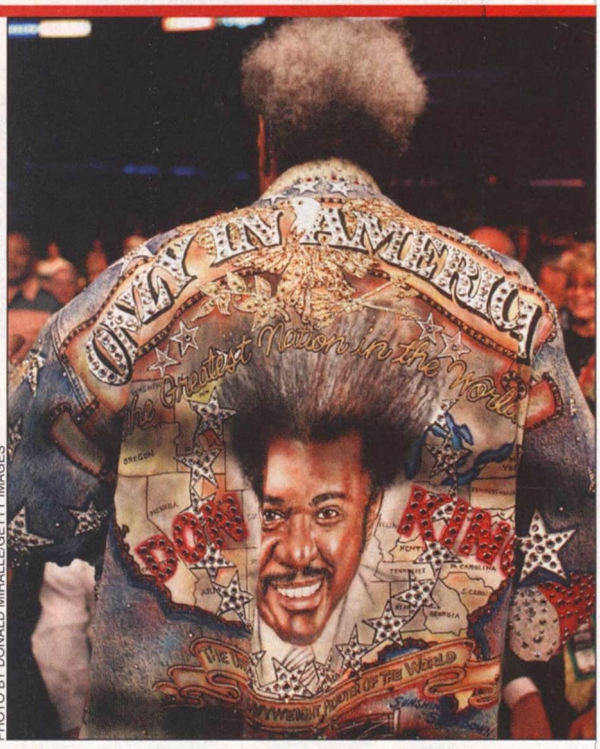


PHOTO BY DONALD MIRALLE/GETTY IMAGES

You have to say this for Don King: A hideous denim jacket featuring enormous pictures of yourself is a tough fashion trend to pull off, and DK kind of makes it work for him. Not since Liberace has tacky style been done so triumphantly.

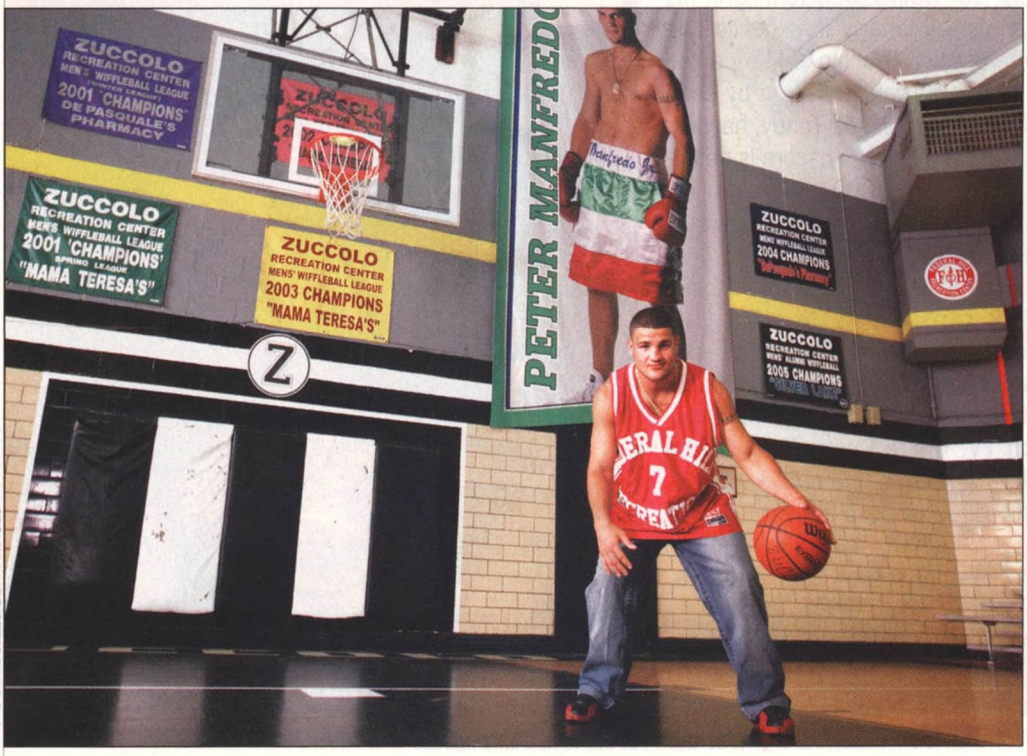


PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Just because Season Two of The Contender *got a lot of attention all summer, that doesn't mean the fighters from Season One have been forgotten—especially in their hometowns. At the Zuccolo Recreation Center in Providence, Rhode Island, where Peter Manfredo Jr. regularly volunteers his time, the boxer is omnipresent thanks to the hanging of his massive banner from the TV show. Maybe he really is "The Pride Of Providence" after all.*

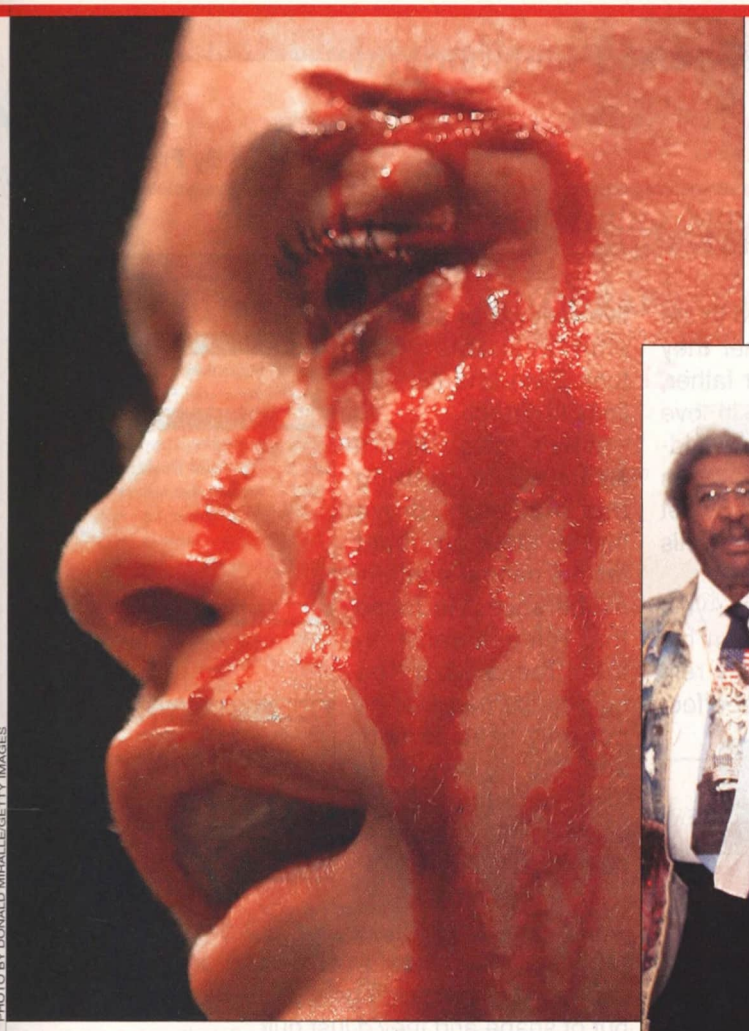


PHOTO BY DONALD MIRALLE/GETTY IMAGES

How appropriate that at an arena called the Staples Center, fighters so often find themselves needing to be stapled shut. First, there was Vitali Klitschko and his grotesque gashes in his fight with Lennox Lewis, and then, this past September on the Sam Peter-James Toney undercard, there was female lightweight Jessica Rakoczy, whose left eye turned into the Grand Canyon after a clash of heads with Belinda Laracuente. The fight was stopped and ruled a no-contest in the third round.

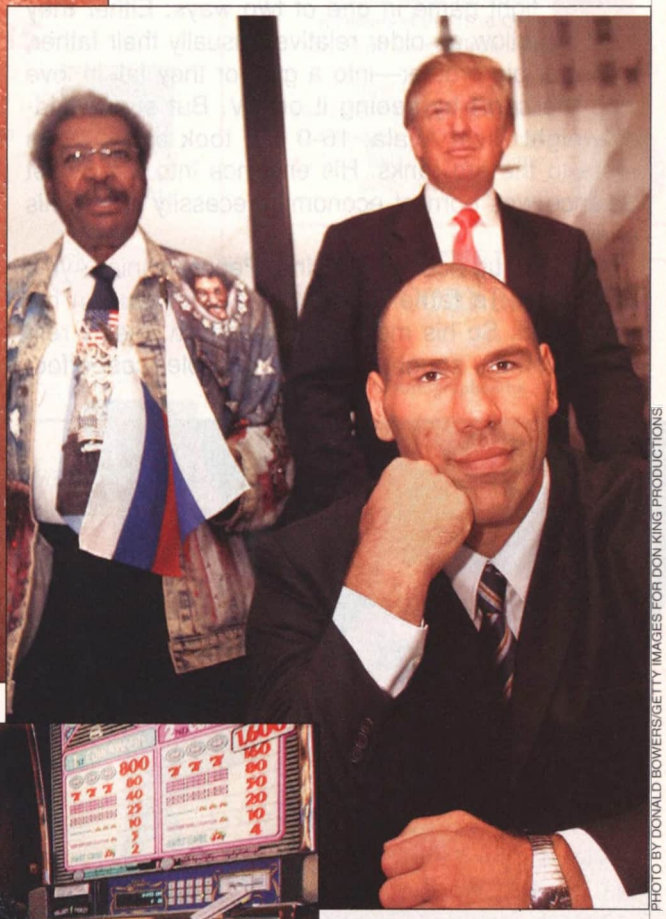


PHOTO BY DONALD BOWERS/GETTY IMAGES FOR DON KING PRODUCTIONS

Here's one guy to whom Donald Trump might be a little bit scared to say, "You're fired!" When his U.S. media tour stopped in New York, super-sized heavyweight Nicolay Valuev grabbed a seat in Trump's office, while two of the world's most powerful Donalds, Trump and King, stood nearby. Hey, with Trump having recently fired right-hand woman Carolyn Kepcher, maybe there's a job opening available for the big Russian in Trump's company.

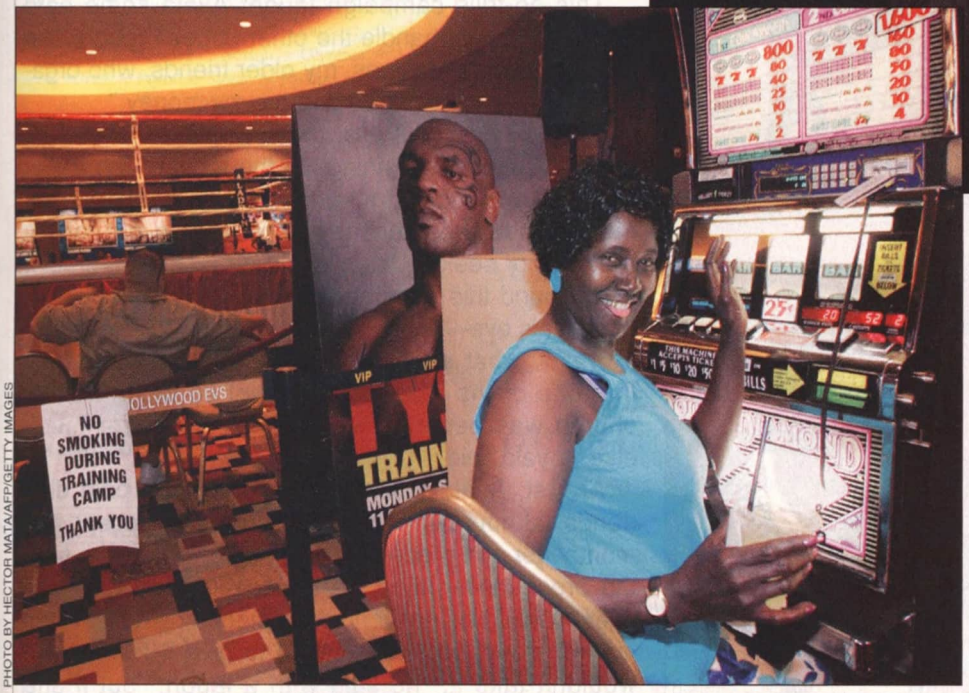


PHOTO BY HECTOR MATA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Directly in front of a ring set up at the Aladdin/Planet Hollywood Resort in Las Vegas where Mike Tyson would soon be participating in a public training session, it's business as usual at the casino, with gamblers playing the slots. Hey, lady, if you should happen to hit the jackpot, could you cut "Iron Mike" in on a slice? By all accounts, he could use it.

By Frank Krewda

Elvin Ayala Super Middleweight

Most professional boxers are introduced to the fight game in one of two ways: Either they follow an older relative—usually their father, uncle, or big brother—into a gym or they fall in love with the sport by seeing it on TV. But super middleweight Elvin Ayala, 16-0 (7), took a circuitous route to the pro ranks. His entrance into the Sweet Science was born of economic necessity during his early teens.

Growing up poor in Reading, Pennsylvania, Ayala had neither a father figure nor a television in his household. So his mother, Elizabeth, a deeply religious woman, sought the most suitable, cost-effective method of supervision available. She took Elvin and his siblings to church.

The long hours Ayala spent "getting that praise on" drove him to seek an outlet for his natural youthful exuberance. He found that release valve on the streets, where he quickly learned that he not only liked to fight and that he was good at it, but also that he could make some money with his fists.

Pro Record

2003		
Sept. 19	Michael Gutrick, Toms River, NJ	W 4
Nov. 11	Darius Hunter, Philadelphia, PA	KO 1
2004		
Jan. 9	Keith Sonley, Uncasville, CT	W 4
Jan. 30	Chris Troupe, Philadelphia	W 4
May 7	Aundalen Sloan, Mashantucket, CT	W 6
June 12	Jacob Rodriguez, Mashantucket	W 6
Aug. 27	Julio Jean, Uncasville	W 6
Nov. 11	Chance Leggett, Boston, MA	KO 7
Dec. 12	Mack Willis, Brockton, MA	KO 2
2005		
April 1	Jose Medina, Uncaville	KO 4
May 6	Raynard Darden, Mashantucket	W 6
July 8	David Estrada, New Haven, CT	KO 8
2006		
March 31	William Gill, Uncasville	W 6
May 10	Virgil McClendon, Mashantucket	KO 4
June 17	Larry Marks, Uncasville	W 10
July 21	John Gottschilling, Uncasville	KO 1

FIGHTS	WON	LOST	DRAW	KOs
16	16	0	0	7

"On the streets, I would fight other dudes, for like $50 a fight," Ayala recalled. "But after a round-and-a-half, the other dudes would be gasping for air because they were so out of shape and they'd just quit."

This no-frills campaign taught Ayala some hard lessons. "I could handle the other dudes I fought," he recalled, "but sometimes, my older friends, who organized the fights, wouldn't give me my money."

Unbeknownst to Ayala, these would-be promoters were investing his winnings in the tools of the trade: gloves, jump rope, trunks, and boots. Only Ayala's friends know whether they were looking out for his progress or seeking to solidify their meal ticket, but it was around this time that another lure of the streets caught his eye—drugs.

"I saw what my older friends had, and I realized that one of the reasons we spent so much time in church was because we had no money for much else," Ayala said.

At first, Ayala's new business venture paid dividends, although his mother refused to accept any money her son made from drug sales. To make sure the proceeds went to the household, Ayala started intentionally "losing" money in places he'd know his mother would find it. "If I tried to give it to her, she wouldn't take it," he said with a laugh, "but if she found it somewhere, she'd be like, 'See how good God is!'"

(Continued on Page 122)

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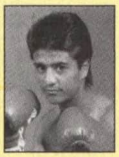

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★ Barry McGuigan
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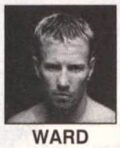
★ Angelo Dundee
★ Angel Manfredy
★ Terry Norris
★ Danny "Little Red" Lopez
★ James "Buster" Douglas
★ Ricardo "Finito" Lopez
★ "Sugar" Shane Mosley
★ Gene Fullmer
★ Acelino "Popo" Freitas
★ Hasim Rahman

CARBAJAL



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A VERY *Un-*MEXICAN VICTORY

At This Point, Barrera Is Pleased To Please Himself

Barrera punishes Juarez with one of the few right hands he threw during their rematch. For most of the bout, Barrera used lateral movement and a stinging jab to win a comprehensive 12-round unanimous decision.

By Don Stradley
PHOTOS BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

During the opening seconds of his September 16 rematch with Rocky Juarez, Marco Antonio Barrera let fly with a right hand. It didn't land, but it zoomed past Juarez' chin with just enough menace to startle the younger fighter. When HBO analyst Emanuel Steward pointed out that Barrera's gloves were taped up for maximum punching (he called it "skinning the gloves"), we began to imagine a soul-stirring kayo victory for Barrera.

Then, just as quickly as he'd thrown it, Barrera packed his right hand away and rarely used it for the remainder of the fight. Instead, he jabbed. He moved. He waited. He countered. Juarez seemed to grow despondent as he realized Barrera's WBC 130-pound title was further out of reach with every round. Juarez had prepared for a back-alley rumble; he was met with finesse.

Just four months earlier, Juarez took Barrera to the limit in a close, ragged, punishing fight. This time, Barrera controlled the fight with movement. It may have been his jab that made the right side of Juarez' face look like a bag of busted plums, but the miracle of the fight was in Barrera's surprisingly light legs. Judges Hubert Minn, Chuck Giampa, and Dave Moretti scored the bout for Barrera by scores of 117-111, 115-113, and 115-113, respectively. Giampa and Moretti must have been feeling generous, because THE RING saw Minn's scoring as the most accurate.

If Juarez was disappointed, many of the 10,421 at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas were equally put out. For all of Barrera's skill, many jeered the fight's lack of toe-to-toe action. Some people actually walked out during the final round.

"The fans are used to seeing me in explosive fights," Barrera said during the postfight press conference. "But I wanted to prove that I can beat him with one hand, my left hand. I wanted to do something different."

Juarez, 25-3 (18), didn't see it that way. "I came to fight tonight," Juarez told the press gathering. "I tried to make him fight, and he wouldn't. He's a Mexican icon, I give him that, but I'm very disappointed. He came up with the right game plan. He clinched, and he smothered my punches, but he didn't want to trade shots. He was too hard to catch."

For the most part, however, Barrera was within striking distance. Barrera's clinching was also grossly exaggerated. Actually, Juarez, who was trying to manhandle Barrera, instigated a lot of the clinching. Apparently, certain aspects of the fight game aren't appreciated the way they once were, not by Juarez, and not by the media, many of whom called the fight boring.

"It was a disappointment," said Bernardo Osuna of Telefutura's *Solo Boxeo*. "Barrera was excellent during the first couple of rounds, but as the fight went on, he seemed more concerned with self-preservation. The most effort he showed was after the last round when he yelled at Rocky, 'How did you like your boxing lesson?' If that's how he wants to perform now, it's up to him. But I never thought I'd see the day when people walked out of a Barrera fight."

Steward saw things differently. "I thought he fought a very good boxing match," he said. "I didn't see him running. He fought a great technical fight. It wasn't much different from when Muhammad Ali regained the championship from Leon Spinks. He did what was necessary. He didn't need to get into a slugfest. To do what he did after 17 years in the sport, still on top of his game, winning a fight over a young guy and not even getting scratched, and pick up $2-million, that's a tribute to a true, professional prizefighter. He did a fantastic job."

Of course, Ali was not known as a big banger, so putting on an artsy display against Spinks was a return to form. Fans were actually comforted watching Ali show his old jab against "Neon Leon." Fans know Barrera for brain-busting warfare. Mexicans might have booed Ali too.

It didn't help that the three fights leading up to the main event were balls-to-the-wall slugouts. Junior feather-

It was a steady, accurate left jab that Barrera used to throw Juarez off his game, lump up his face, and score more than enough points to win with relative ease. Afterward, Barrera asked Juarez how he liked his boxing lesson.

Barrera deftly pulls away from a Juarez right. Although many in attendance at the MGM Grand and a surprising number of media members criticized Barrera for fighting a dull fight, more astute observers were impressed with his masterful craftsmanship.

weight champion Israel Vazquez stopped Jhonny Gonzalez, but only after both had been on the canvas twice; Joan Guzman won a tough split decision over the always-entertaining Jorge Barrios; Jorge Paez Jr. was dropped and rocked more than once during a close decision win over Derrick Campos. After all of that action, the spectators were primed and ready for a Mexican blood fest. But even if Barrera's performance wasn't a classic, it was impressive. How many other 32-year-olds fighting two weight classes above their prime could whip Juarez with one hand?

Barrera has been leaning toward this type of style for a long time. Ten years and 10 pounds ago, he could break a man in half with bodypunches. But he hasn't carried his power up to 130, and has virtually done away with bodypunching. Last September, he boxed brilliantly against Robbie Peden. He was booed that night too. Against Juarez last May, he seemed uncomfortable, like a grown man forced back into a rough kid's game. That a plodder like Juarez was able to test him must have been insulting to a perfectionist like Barrera. With hindsight, we should have known Barrera would box. And we shouldn't be surprised that the response was less than enthusiastic.

"There's a greater tendency now to think if it's not violent, it's not good," said HBO commentator Jim Lampley, who was surprised by the scathing tone of the postfight reaction. Like Steward, Lampley was impressed with Barrera's showing, comparing him to Roy Jones and Bernard Hopkins.

"He did what they did through most of their entire careers, which was to limit the risk, use boxing skill to control the ring, and make sure you would win the rounds without exposing yourself to any unnecessary damage," Lampley said. "Some of the guys I saw raking Barrera over the coals were the same guys who lionized Bernard Hopkins. It was confusing, to say the least. I think it has to do with the notion of Latino fighters, how he

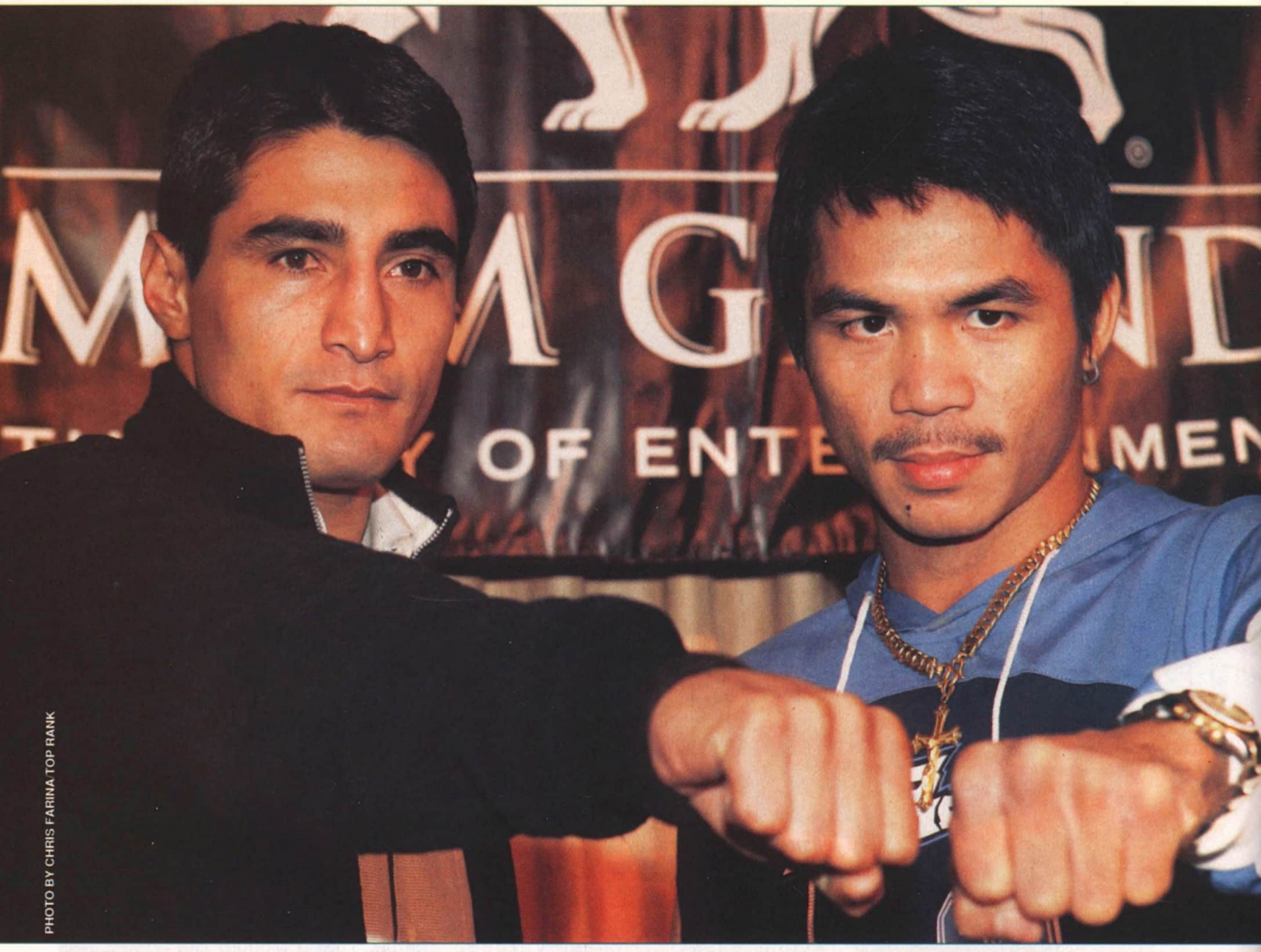


PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA TOP RANK

Most likely, Barrera's next fight will be against the winner of the Erik Morales-Manny Pacquiao rubber match, scheduled for November 18. He currently leads his series with Morales, 2-1, but lost his only match with Pac-Man.

betrayed his birthright by fighting in a calculated style instead of showing his cajones all the time.

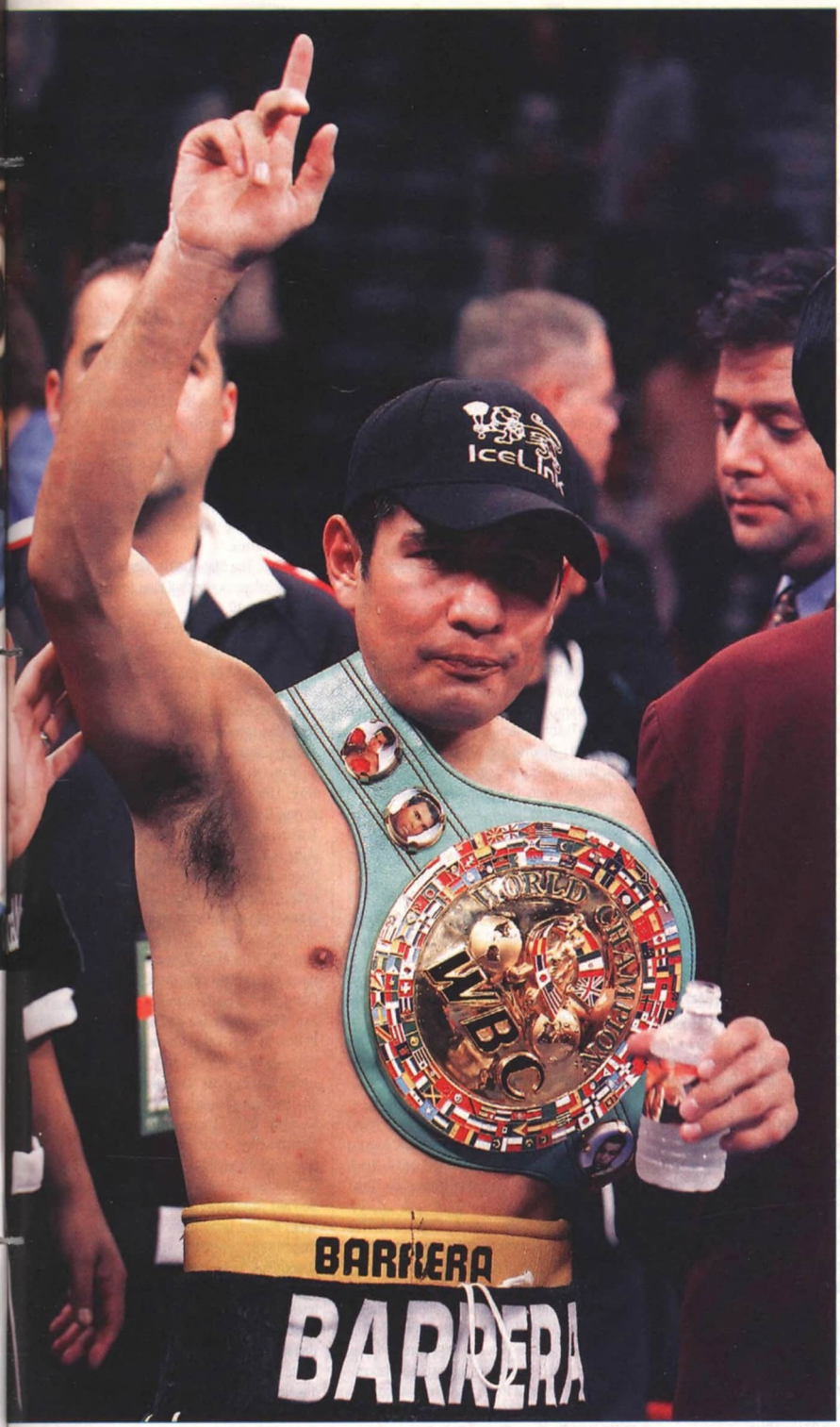
"Larry Merchant thinks there may have been a greater appreciation for the artistry of Barrera 20 or 30 years ago," Lampley continued. "I thought he was brilliant. He was hit hard so many times last May. Against the same opponent, I can't remember him getting really rocked a single time. If you can't appreciate the beauty of that, maybe you really do prefer K-1 or UFC, or something."

A decade of Mike Tyson clips and men strangling each other in a cage may have eroded a generation's appreciation for the Sweet Science. Perhaps boxing fans should take a tip from baseball fans. Baseball fans enjoy homeruns, but they also appreciate the bunt, the hit-and-run, the sacrifice fly, and the pitchers' duel. It will behoove boxing fans to appreciate the subtler aspects of their own sport. Otherwise, anything less than caveman brawls will be a letdown. But even if you booed the fight, you can't boo Barrera.

Barrera, 63-4 (42) with 1 no-contest, could've waited for the Manny Pacquiao-Erik Morales winner. Or, he could have taken an easy opponent just to kill some time and pad the bank account. Instead, he said bring me Juarez again; I didn't like the controversy of our last fight. That's admirable. Besides, Barrera has already done everything a fighter can do to be called great. Even if his win over Juarez didn't appeal to the mugs in the cheap seats, he smartly preserved himself for bigger fights in the near future. While we're on the subject, we wondered which fighter would provide the best storybook ending for Barrera's storybook career.

A fourth fight with Morales might seem farfetched at this point, but it would still be a huge ticket in the Mexican market. Their rivalry has been hot for years. They've insulted each other in print and they've gone at each other during press junkets. They've done everything but exchange gunshots. It's rare these days for fighters to meet a fourth time, but Morales and Barrera might be a welcome exception. After beating Juarez, however, Barrera called out Pacquiao's name. That makes sense. Junior Jones is no longer around, and Barrera is ahead 2-1 against Morales. It's Pacquiao who remains the grinning ghoul from Barrera's past.

A good argument can be made that Barrera was simply distracted when he lost to Pacquiao in 2003. The kind of slick boxing Barrera displayed against Juarez might befuddle Pacquiao. Remember, Pac-Man struggled against a slick-boxing Juan Manuel Marquez in



At age 32 and after 68 professional fights, Barrera is still one of the finest fighters in the world. If he had continued to make every fight a war, it's highly unlikely he'd still be on top today.

2004 and ended up with a draw. Could Barrera possibly outpoint Pacquiao by boxing carefully?

"You'd have to make Manny the favorite," said Lampley. "With his speed, his dynamism, and what he was able to do in the first fight, you'd have to make him the favorite. But that doesn't mean Marco couldn't win. He'd relish the role of underdog. He'd have to find a way into Manny's head and give him something entirely different from their first fight. No one can beat Manny physically. You have to beat him with your brain. And if anyone can do that, it's Marco.

"He's the smartest fighter in the sport. If I had to put my money on one fighter to look at the first fight and say, 'Here's what went wrong, here's the adjustment,' he's the guy."

"I think Barrera has enough boxing skills to win," said Steward. "Pacquiao is still too predictable. He throws that long one-two and hasn't really changed much."

"I don't know if he has enough to beat Pacquiao," said Osuna. "I'd rather see him fight Morales. It would be a closer fight because they're at the same stage in their careers. Pacquiao might do some damage to Barrera. Actually, I might prefer to see Barrera do something different and fight Juan Manuel Marquez. That way he's passing the torch to a younger Mexican. And if he beats Marquez, he can say he beat the best Mexican fighters of his time."

Regardless of whom Barrera chooses to fight, he probably won't be able to use the same careful style he used against Juarez. In a way, Juarez allowed Barrera to control the fight. Had Juarez given Barrera ample reason to brawl, we'd have seen Barrera unload some heavy punches. Pacquiao and Morales would not be so accommodating. Pacquiao is too much of a whirlwind. Morales hates Barrera too much. Even Marquez would provide Barrera with more danger than the lead-footed Juarez. At some point against those three elite fighters, Barrera will have to stand and fire. We'd love it. But if he carefully pecks his way to a points win, he's already made it clear that he doesn't mind the booing.

"It's understandable," Barrera said after beating Juarez. "People pay money for entertainment. Whichever way they are entertained is fine with me. But this is a sport where you are supposed to hit and not get hit."

Perhaps it all depends on whether you see boxing as a sport or as entertainment. If it's the latter, Barrera will disappoint you. But if it's the former, you'll enjoy watching him finish his career with a stunning win, even if he's no longer stunning his opponents. ■

Don Stradley is a freelance writer from Massachusetts and a regular contributor to this magazine.

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Sept. 1990: Marvin Hagler—Can He Resist The Irresistible Temptation? Plus: Thomas Hearns, Sanchez-Saddler, Paul Banke, puncher vs. chin, Beau Jack, Robinson-LaMotta (color).

Nov. 1990: Tyson vs. Foreman. Can Iron Mike Stop The Blast From The Past? Plus: Bruce Seldon, best chins, Sullivan-Kilrain (color), Azumah Nelson, LaStarza.

Dec. 1990: Exclusive Annual Report: The State Of The Game. Plus: Douglas-Holyfield preview, Julio Cesar Chavez, Joe Grim, Whitaker-Nazario, Rosi-Van Horn, Benny Leonard, Douglas-Tyson (color).

Feb. 1991: Boxing On TV—Now You'll Pay! Plus: Ismael Laguna, Tommy Morrison in *Rocky V*, Reggie Tuur, Chiquita Gonzalez, Harold Green, Joe Louis.

April 1991: Julio Cesar Chavez—Fighter Of The Year. Plus: Tyson-Stewart, James Leija, Wilfred Benitez, Pedro Decima, Moore-Bassey.

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July 1991: Tyson's Title Hopes: He Ain't What He Used To Be ... But It's Not Gonna Matter. Plus: Eusebio Pedroza, Myung Woo Yuh, Willie Meehan, Hearns-Hill preview, computer junior welterweight tournament, Gomez-Fenech, controversial heavyweight finishes (color).

Aug. 1991: Foreman Gives Holyfield A Fight ... And The World A Thrill (color). Plus: Making weight, Harry Greb, Kevin Kelley, Louis-Conn I, Simon Brown-Blocker, Chavez-Duplessis, Sugar Ray Robinson.

July 1992: Does Larry Holmes Deserve A Title Shot? Plus: Nelson-Fenech II, Tracy Patterson, Kelley-Dorsey, fat fighters, Buchanan-Camacho, Holmes-Ali (color).

Aug. 1992: Holyfield-Holmes Prefight. Holmes: "I See Me Takin' Holyfield Outta There." Plus: Iran Barkley, Herbie Hide, George Foreman, Tex Cobb, Carnival of Champions, Harry Greb, Haugen-Mancini, Oscar De La Hoya, Gene Tunney (color).

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Feb. 1993: America's Tribute To The Brown Bomber: Joe Louis. Plus: Virgil Hill, Junior Jones, Roger Mayweather, Chicago boxing, Orlando Zulueta, Jose Napoles (color).

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Aug. 1994: Bowe's Back! Determined To Do It Again. Plus: Eric Griffin, Pernell Whitaker, Ray Mercer, Roger Donoghue, State of the Game (midterm report), All-Time Top 10: The Philippines.

Dec. 1994: Fighting-Mad! James Toney Just Wants To Beat People Up. Plus: Duran & Robinson, Don King, Mike McCallum, injuries (part II), Tom Molineaux.

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Nov. 1996: Pole-Axed! Low Blows, Sinking Bowe, Ugly Show. Plus: Bowe-Golota I, Blinky Palermo, exciting fighters, Winky Wright, Joe Brown.

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Holiday 1999 (92-Page Special): Heavyweight Showdowns! Holyfield vs. Lewis II, Grant vs. Golota. Plus: Francois Botha, Arturo Gatti, Michael Carbajal, Rocky Marciano, Lou Filippo.

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BAD BOY

Tournament winner Brewer and his wife, Brandi, posed with an enlarged version of The Ring *cover that features him and Sugar Ray Leonard. Brewer, who already had 11 losses when he was selected to be part of* The Contender, *now has a bright future ahead of him.*

THE CONTENDER

IS THE CONTENDER GOOD FOR BOXING?

THE OVERALL IMPACT IS STARTING TO BECOME APPARENT

By William Dettloff
PHOTOS BY JAN SANDERS

The fight game reeks of its troubles. It always has. They aren't what they were when the gangsters ran everything and most of the big fights were fixed (you remember, the good old days), but they're with us nonetheless.

Some of the problems are chronic and so singularly human as to be intractable: greed, shortsightedness, and cronyism. It's always been a business first, a sport second. Then somebody got the idea that more titles generate more money in the short term, so today there are too many weight classes and titleholders, and not enough champions.

Perhaps most troubling is a dwindling fan base that, depending

Brewer rams a straight right into Forbes' face. Brewer's height and reach advantage, combined with the fact that he is the naturally larger man, helped him win a 10-round split decision.

Forbes cracks Brewer with a solid right. Although Forbes probably landed the harder punches, he didn't land enough of them to turn the fight in his favor.

on whom you ask, is either reflective of a normal downward trend in a cyclical, star-centric business susceptible to downward trends, or the impolite suggestion that the world has moved on while we who remain whistle past the graveyard.

Those of us sensitive to the latter possibility rejoiced two years ago when NBC aired *The Contender*. Why? Because although boxing has always survived its myriad afflictions and disorders (indeed, they are part of its allure), fighters and the business need lots of people to watch—particularly people eager to pay for the privilege.

The Contender seemed right off the bat to affect that. It didn't shake the foundations of the sport or propel it to the heights it enjoyed even 20 years ago, but it did expose it to a whole new class of television viewers. That can't be bad. And now, with its second season concluded, we can see that the series has, on some level, changed the game. The question is, for good or bad?

The answer would seem a no-brainer. "More eyeballs are good for boxing," said promoter and former HBO executive Lou DiBella. "Anything that brings new, young fans into the game, everyone in the sport should be celebrating. If something is bringing more people to the sport, I'm for it."

Those of us who can remember when the game was an important part of the cultural discussion in America can't abide the thought of it being relegated to a status alongside such geeky niche pursuits as skateboarding or synchronized swimming. It would be one thing if it started there. It didn't. Our heavyweight champions were kings.

So most of us danced around a little when *The Contender* debuted and broke open the souls of a bunch of tough, young junior middleweights, laid them out for all to see and made TV stars of a few of them. It was good TV, corny in spots and flawed, but good. Surely it would help.

Our hearts sank a bit when, at the conclusion of the first season, the network canned it after jerking it all over the schedule, a practice that, to some degree or another, limited the average weekly viewership to a paltry (by network standards) six million viewers.

The creators took the show to ESPN, and the second season performed well according to industry sources: initial airings averaged about a 1.5 share, which translates to roughly 1.5 million homes. In the aggregate (including repeat airings), the show reached four to five million homes. On network TV that means death. On basic cable, it means another season—at least. It has done very well with 18- to 35-year-old males, and also has brought in female viewers in good numbers. That would seem good news.

Not everyone thinks so. Amid all the cautious backslapping (cautious because people in this business have been burned before and are cynical by nature anyway), there is the low, steady drone of the anti-*Contender* faction. There are many in the industry and among the hardcore fans who detest the show and everything they believe it stands for.

Victory finally brings a smile to Brewer's face

They detest it the way devotees of jazz detest *American Idol* or the way part-time musicians detest Britney Spears. To many it does little but peddle the drippy sentimentality of second-rate pugs, while other, better, more-deserving prizefighters, who maybe aren't as cuddly, continue scraping by on poorly-attended shows in Tulsa or Biloxi.

They hate the editing and the sound effects, the glitz, the product placement,

Brewer Takes Home the $500,000

If the producers of the show had their druthers, you can bet *The Contender* championship match wouldn't have been contested between Steve Forbes and Grady Brewer, a pair of light-hitting boxers. They (and we) would probably have preferred a tense shootout between sluggers Michael Stewart and Gary Balletto or a bloody battle of attrition between Norberto Bravo and, say, Ebo Elder. Alas, these are "real" fights after all, and as happens occasionally, both fights on the televised finale were pedestrian.

Cornelius "K-9" Bundrage, 24-2 (14), won in the semifinal by dismantling a strangely passive Bravo, 22-12-3 (12) en route to a seventh-round knockout win. Bundrage appeared to be too big, too awkward, and too fast for Bravo, whose collapse propelled the younger members of his family into crying spasms at ringside. Forbes and Brewer would do the same for us in the finale.

Brewer, 22-11 (12), charged into Forbes throughout and landed the better punches, but he fell inside too often after his looping, long-armed advances. The result was a sloppy, clinch-filled mess that had many among the 12,000-plus fans at the Staples Center booing by the middle rounds. Forbes, 32-4 (9), couldn't decide whether to fight Brewer inside or outside, and by the time he made up his mind, it was too late. The split decision went against him by scores of 97-93, 96-94, and 94-96. THE RING scored it 97-93 for Brewer.

"I did what I trained in the gym to do and was myself," said Brewer, a disarmingly morose-looking sort whose forlorn countenance was changed not a bit by the recognition he'd just earned $500,000. Journeymen fighters are a hard lot.

—W.D.

The Best and Worst of Season Two

Best Change From Season One: Two-way tie: no more challenges, no more phony press conferences.

Worst Change From Season One: No more Sylvester Stallone. He was goofy, but we missed the big guy anyway.

Best Looking Significant Other: Valerie Forbes, and not by a little. Honorable mentions go to Gary Balletto's wife, Brandi Brewer, Michael Clark's better half, and Mrs. Ebo Elder, who gets extra points for making out with Ebo in the ring after Michael Stewart knocked him loopy.

Best Tug At The Heart Strings: Balletto's daughter reading his birthday card to him.

Worst Reward: Digital cameras. ESPN: If you can get it at Wal-Mart, you're not digging deep enough.

Best Punch Of The Tournament: The left hook Stewart landed to turn around his fight with Elder.

Worst Product Placement Gimmick: The fighters hurling tires onto the bed of a Toyota Tundra.

Best Surprise: How well Ray Leonard did as the solo host. He was excellent.

Worst Strategic Decision: Clark calling out Cornelius Bundrage.

Best Emotional Collapses: Norberto Bravo

Worst Example Set For Young Fighters: Rudy Cisneros eating anything he wanted and then sweating down to weight the day before his fight.

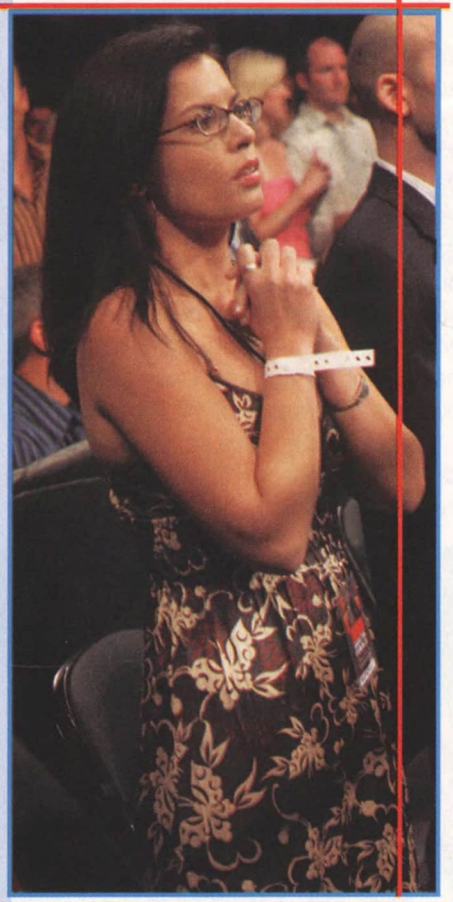
Best Heart-Wrenching Line By A Fighter: Bravo: "If I don't deserve this, my family does."

Worst Mismatch: Walter Wright W 5 Andre Eason

Best Non-Fight Scene: Ebo and Stewart awkwardly eating breakfast together the day they are scheduled to fight one another.

Worst Abuse of Clichés By Trainer: You name it, Jeremy Williams used it.

—W.D.



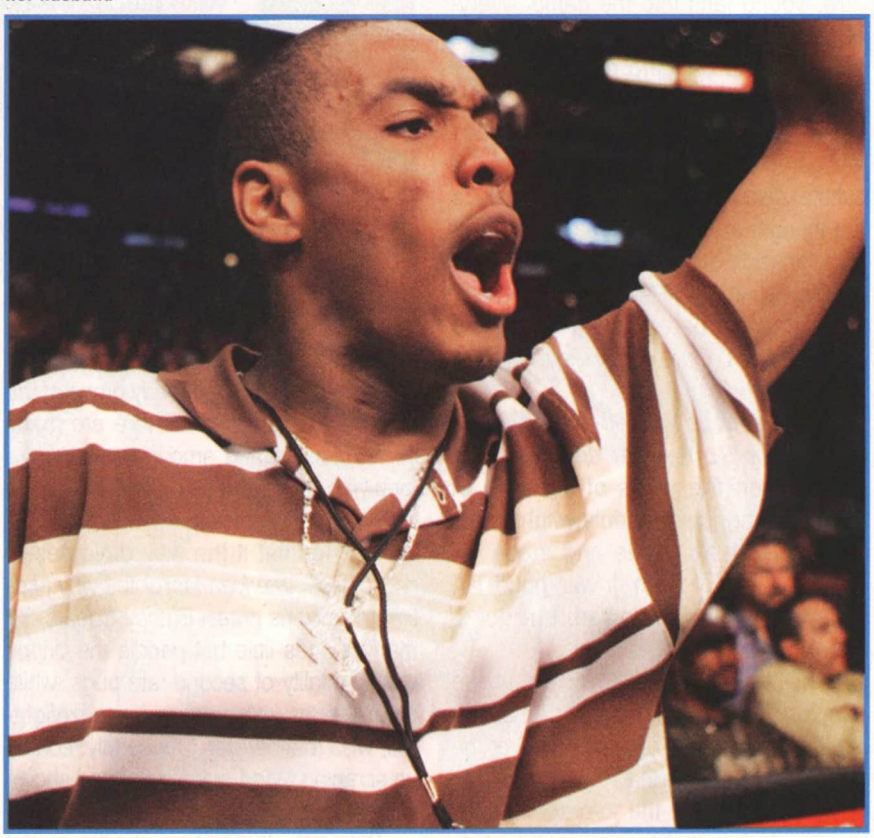
An anxious-looking Valerie Forbes watches her husband

and the fact it is, before anything else, television. Many have said and written that not only is it bad TV, it is bad for the game. Is it, even with all those new eyeballs watching?

"I understand why some think the show is bad for boxing, but I don't necessarily agree," said Showtime analyst Steve Farhood. "First of all, *The Contender* is a TV show first, last, and always, and not reflective of boxing in any way. I hope we all understand that by this point."

Not everyone does. When Showtime announced the super middleweight tournament that would air on its *ShoBox* series, the tournament's promoter, Gary Shaw, trumpeted, "Back in the day, fighters had to fight tough competition and win to raise their ratings." It was a clear dig at *Contender* season-one winner Sergio Mora, whose recent appearance in the top 10 of one of the sanctioning bodies rankled many in the sport. Writer Nat Gottlieb, while praising the *ShoBox* tournament in a piece at tigerboxing.com, called it "the Anti-Contender."

Gottlieb isn't alone. At maxboxing.com, writer Jason Probst opined, in a remark-



Brewer's son, Geovanty, roots for his father from ringside. The boxers' families were a significant part of the series and helped humanize the fighters.

A large crowd of more than 12,000 turned out at the Staples Center, but many of them were disappointed at the sloppy, scrambling nature of the main event and began booing in the middle rounds.

able show of restraint, "*The Contender* needs to be taken out in back of the shed and clubbed to death, with extreme prejudice." On the pages of this very magazine, RING columnist and West Coast correspondent Ivan Goldman took his own swipes at *The Contender.*

The great majority of this antipathy springs from the editing down of the bouts to five small chunks that may or may not, depending on your point of view, reflect what occurred in the ring. (You can throw in the sound effects too, and the shots of the crowd, the speeding-up of the footage, etc.). There are conspiracy theorists in every corner, and they believe we don't see enough to accurately gage who deserved to win. According to Executive Co-Producer Jeff Wald, there are good reasons for doing it the way it's done.

"The show is designed to bring people back to the great sport of boxing. To accomplish this we needed to have people care about them as human beings and as the great highly trained athletes that they are," Wald said. "Since we were doing more than showing just fights, the fights were edited to fit in our time allowed. The results were (rendered) by the same California judges, referees, and officials that decide the results of every professional fight in the state of California. Some of our judges and referees are boxing Hall of Famers. In no case were the results manipulated."

Moreover, Wald adds, "The interest in any sport is enhanced when the audience becomes involved with the athlete on a personal level. Viewers wanted both of our boxers to win in our fights because they cared about them." In other words, you can't have everything. You can't have the emotional involvement and the entire fight. Each episode would run two hours long.

Still, Wald recognizes the dissatisfaction among the hardcore and told THE RING that next season the show will probably have a separate airing of the unedited fights in their entirety. Is such a move even necessary? Many viewers recognize that you can't have it both ways, that the ratings are driven by the emotional connection, not the fights. If you want proof, name another fight series that averages a million viewers. To many, the stories are the story.

"I watch it," said DiBella. "I wasn't a huge supporter initially. Even now I hate the sound effects and the way they cut the fights. But I see why young people are watching it—they like the stories. And there are great storylines in boxing. That's what people like about it. People watch professional wrestling, even

Brewer slams home a left uppercut as Forbes ducks low. Despite many punches thrown over the course of the bout, neither man was down or seriously hurt at any point.

though it's a comic book, because it has stories. *The Contender* tells stories."

Farhood agrees. "As corny as it often seems, the humanization of the fighters is refreshing because the up-close-and-personal features that used to be a staple of network production are rarely part of the broadcasts," he said. "Allowing a fighter's personality to emerge is not a bad thing," even if, as Farhood said, he is losing patience with the "cookie-cutter plotlines."

To the detractors, the storylines are part of the problem—apparently *all* fighters fight to give their family a better life—and doesn't bestow upon them in any event the moral right to leapfrog over more deserving pugs. When there was talk some months ago of Mora getting a shot at world middleweight champion Jermain Taylor, the teeth grinding was deafening. Predictably, DiBella, who promotes Taylor, disagrees.

"Integration of their fighters into the (boxing) mainstream is good for the sport," he said. "Sergio Mora can fight, and you know what? If he keeps winning, he deserves a shot at Jermain. Grady Brewer (who won the tournament in the second season) is a real fighter. Ask Jermain and ask Sechew Powell." (Taylor decisioned Brewer over eight rounds in 2002; Powell won a highly unpopular decision over Brewer two years later).

Say DiBella is wrong. Say former *Contenders* get to the top faster. Big deal. Any promoter will tell you this is a business and the guys who get the title shots are the ones who bring in the customers. If they're bitching, it's because they didn't think of it first. Or they don't have anyone from the show signed up—yet.

Wald makes the case too: "Mora, Peter Manfredo, and Alfonso Gomez have become huge draws and have been winning their fights. They have consistently fought better and better opponents. We expect the same results for our season two fighters. Our guys are winning against good talent and their fights are unedited."

The Contender has indeed changed things. Good or bad doesn't matter. The fight game has survived maladies far more malignant than a reality television show. It'll survive this too, and just may come out the better for it. ■

Ranking The Best Fighters In The World

By Eric Raskin

Since The Ring's sister magazine, *KO*, first took on the daunting task of ranking the 100 best fighters in the sport back in 1996—a feature that eventually was taken over by The Ring, as the evidence in your hands presumably made obvious to you—five different men have held the top spot: Oscar De La Hoya, Roy Jones, Shane Mosley, Bernard Hopkins, and Floyd Mayweather.

Here we are a decade later, and all five men are still on the list. But this is almost definitely the last time that will be true. Hopkins has probably fought for the last time, De La Hoya claims to be one bout from the end, Jones has reached the point where he's always potentially one punch from hanging it up, and Mosley is no fresh-faced newbie at 34. The guard has been somewhat slow to change. But make no mistake: It *is* changing. Heck, even "Pretty Boy" Mayweather is just a few months away from turning 30.

"The Ring 100" is always useful for showing you just how much change is going down in boxing. This year, 29 of the 100 men who cracked the list weren't on it a year ago—which of course means that 29 fighters who *were* on the list in '05 are now gone. Most notable among them: the inactive Kostya Tszyu, who's been a part of the "100" every year since its inception. But he's not the only "Ring 100" fixture who's suddenly out of the mixture. Gone too are Rosendo Alvarez, Chris Byrd, Fernando Vargas, and Arturo Gatti, all of them knockout victims in the past year, not to mention Vitali Klitschko, who retired in the face of mounting injury troubles.

So how do we determine who gets in and who doesn't and where to rank them? Unlike our divisional rankings, which are based almost completely on results, the pound-for-pound rankings are derived through a combination of results (somewhat objective) and ability (highly subjective). In other words, it's about "what have you done for me lately?" as well as "what might you do for me in the future?"

For the purposes of this year's list, the future begins on September 21, since September 20 was our press deadline. Over the next 31 pages, you'll see how we ranked the 100 best boxers in the world as of that date. You'll see some names for the first time. You'll see some names for the last time. You'll see five names that have been to the top. And you'll probably see a few names whose time on top will someday come.

1 FLOYD **MAYWEATHER** Welterweight 36-0 (24)

Last Year's Ranking: 1
Status Report: Boxing's most flawless performer had another virtually flawless year in the ring, going 2-0 in his first two fights at welterweight with wins over Sharmba Mitchell (KO 6) and Zab Judah (W 12). But his hold on the top spot is somewhat tenuous because of the perception that he's been ducking his most dangerous foes the last couple of years.
Future: Headed toward a November challenge of legitimate welterweight champion Carlos Baldomir, arguably the most meaningful fight available to "Pretty Boy." You can't criticize this one.

2 WINKY **WRIGHT** Middleweight 50-3-1 (25)

Last Year's Ranking: 2
Status Report: Had he finished a little stronger against Jermain Taylor, he might be the undisputed middleweight champion and the pound-for-pound king right now. Instead, Wright settled for a disputed 12-round draw against Taylor, and remains the top contender in both sets of rankings as a result. Whomever you thought won that fight, it's hard to deny the savvy and skill of the southpaw veteran, who also handled Sam Soliman (W 12) since last year's rankings.
Future: Said he doesn't want a rematch with Taylor, and appears headed toward a fight with Ike Quartey.

3 MANNY **PACQUIAO** Junior Lightweight 42-3-2 (33)

Last Year's Ranking: 5
Status Report: Hasn't had any trouble bouncing back from his first loss in six years (in March '05 against Erik Morales), crushing Hector Velazquez (KO 6), Morales in a rematch (KO 10), and Oscar Larios (W 12). "Pac-Man" is an icon in his native Philippines—and has become pretty darned popular here in the States too.
Future: Rubber match with Morales is slated for November 18, and we doubt Morales has enough left to outfight this prime, 27-year-old wrecking machine.

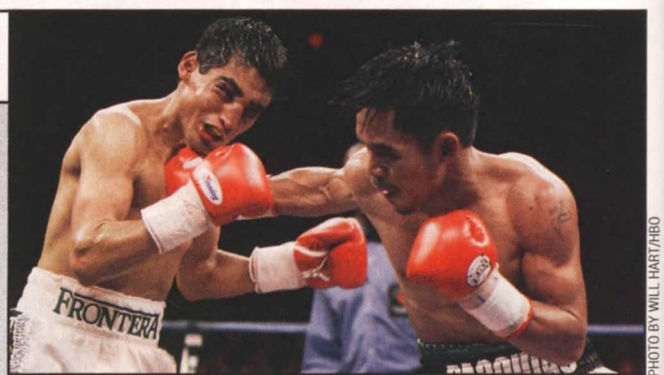


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Pacquiao cracks Morales with a right hook

4 JERMAIN **TAYLOR** World Middleweight Champion 25-0-1 (17)

Last Year's Ranking: 9
Status Report: Last year, nobody knew quite where to rank the middleweight champ, based on his controversial win over then-P-4-P king Bernard Hopkins. After another close win over Hopkins (W 12) and a draw with penultimate pound-for-pounder Winky Wright, we now have a better idea of where to place "Bad Intentions." Though still somewhat raw, the 2000 Olympic bronze medalist is assuredly an elite fighter.
Future: Scheduled to defend against Kassim Ouma in Little Rock, Arkansas, on December 9.

5 BERNARD **HOPKINS** World Light Heavyweight Champion 47-4-1 (32) with 1 no-contest

Last Year's Ranking: 10
Status Report: Can we see a birth certificate please? At age 41, Hopkins fought an extraordinarily effective fight after moving up 15 pounds to face Antonio Tarver (W 12), earning a legitimate world title in the process. Though he has since announced his retirement, he'll remain on the pound-for-pound list for a little while longer, just in case he decides to come back and teach the youngsters another thing or two.
Future: If it's all promoting and no more boxing, then Bernard, we'll see you at ringside … and in Canastota in 2011.

Hopkins jolts Tarver with a right

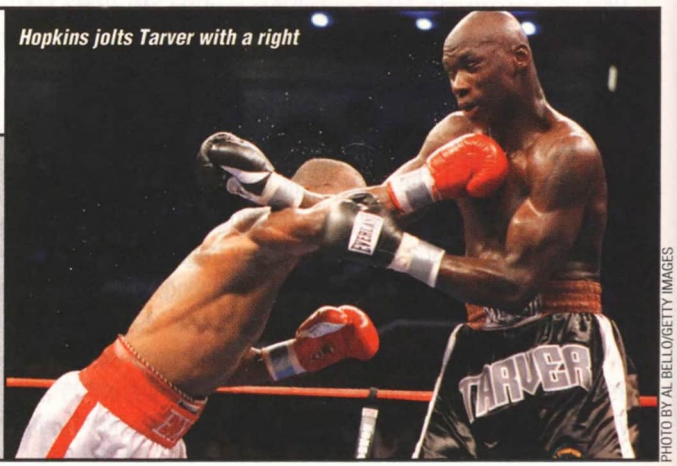


PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

1 FLOYD MAYWEATHER

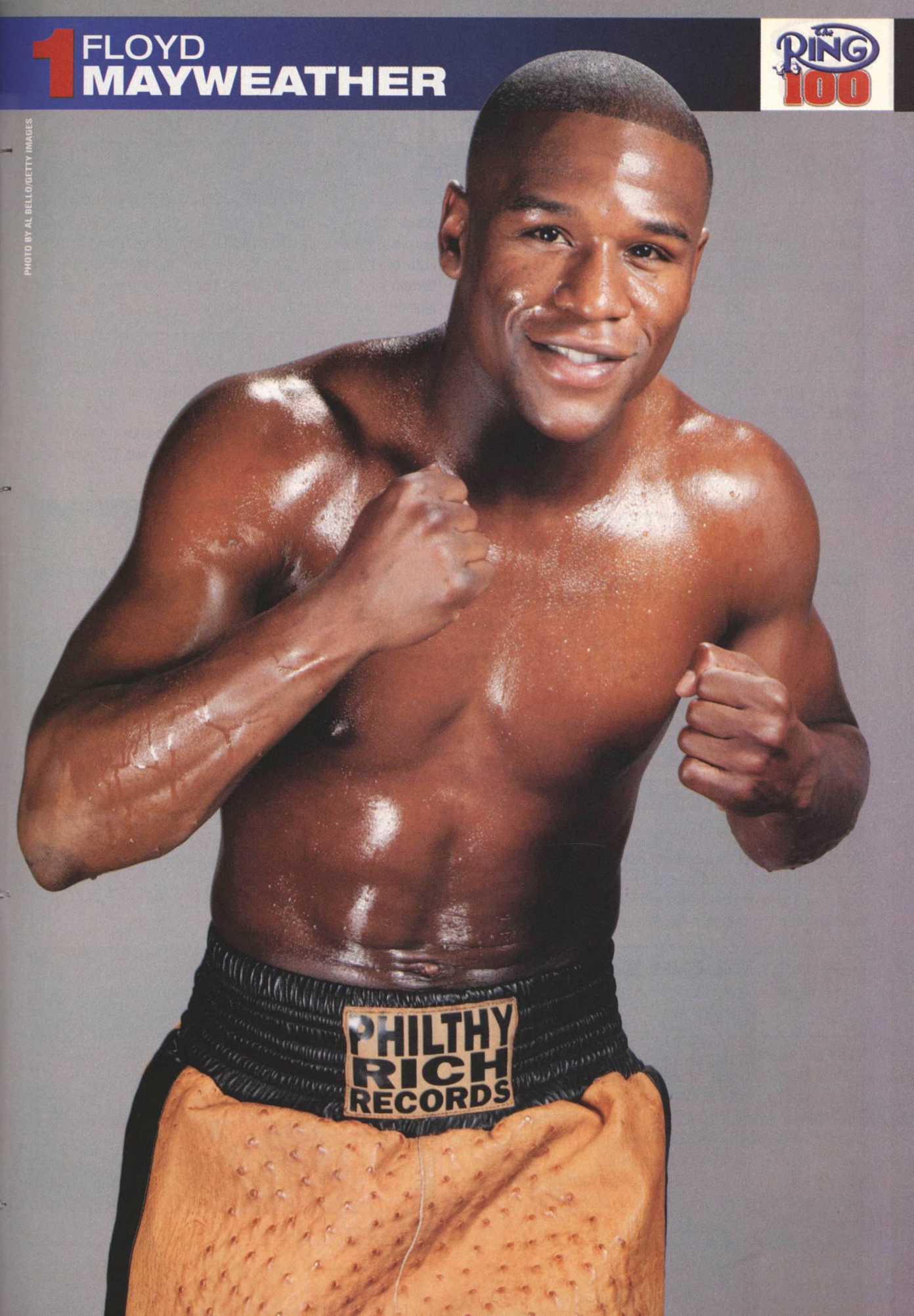


PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

6 MARCO ANTONIO **BARRERA**
WBC Super Featherweight Titleholder 63-4 (42) with 1 no-contest

Last Year's Ranking: 3
Status Report: Clear-cut decision victory over Rocky Juarez in rematch proved that the 32-year-old Barrera isn't too old to learn. Instead of exchanging with his hard-hitting rival, he boxed masterfully, even though it didn't go over well with some among the crowd. Besides the controversial first fight with Juarez (W 12), the Mexican icon also pasted Robbie Peden (W 12) since the last Ring 100.
Future: The undemanding victory over Juarez helped preserve Barrera for a rematch with Manny Pacquiao, providing "Pac-Man" thumps Erik Morales in their rubber match.

7 RAFAEL **MARQUEZ** IBF Bantamweight Titleholder 36-3 (32)

Last Year's Ranking: 14
Status Report: Silence Mabuza was undefeated a year ago, and now he has two losses, both by TKO, thanks to the supreme boxing and punching proficiency of the younger Marquez brother. Mabuza was dropped and dominated en route to being stopped on cuts in four rounds in November '05, then took a pounding on his way to a ninth-round kayo loss in the August '06 rematch.
Future: After more than a decade of making 118 pounds, it's time to move on up to junior feather. If we're lucky, a showdown with 122-pound world champ Israel Vazquez awaits.

8 RICKY **HATTON**
World Junior Welterweight Champion 41-0 (30)

Last Year's Ranking: 7
Status Report: The 2005 Fighter of the Year's follow-up campaign got off to a rocky start when he barely snuck by clever Luis Collazo (W 12) in his welterweight debut and first fight in the U.S. in six years. Though the Brit did get the "W" on his record, he didn't impress at 147 and will probably have to return to 140 if he's to remain among the P-4-P elite.
Future: Scheduled to fight on HBO again, probably against Juan Urango at junior welter, and, if all goes well, a fight fan's dream match with Jose Luis Castillo looms in '07.

PHOTO BY NICK LAHAM/GETTY IMAGES
Hatton hooks Collazo en route to winning WBA welter strap

9 JOSE LUIS **CASTILLO** Junior Welterweight 54-7-1 (47)

Last Year's Ranking: 13
Status Report: You can curse him for blowing the third fight with Diego Corrales, you can call him a cheater or a jerk … but you can't penalize him in the pound-for-pound rankings for failing to make weight. When he has made weight in the past year—or, at least, come close enough for his opponents to go ahead with the fights—the Mexican has gotten the job done, gaining revenge in the second fight with Corrales (KO 4) and handling Rolando Reyes (W 12) in a snoozer.
Future: Moving up to 140 pounds (it's about friggin' time), where he may face Ricky Hatton next year.

10 JOE **CALZAGHE**
World Super Middleweight Champion 41-0 (31)

Last Year's Ranking: 29
Status Report: After years of treading water, the Welshman finally got his chance and treaded all over Jeff Lacy's face, winning what would have been a shutout decision if not for a late-rounds point deduction. Magnificent display of speed and ring intelligence earned Calzaghe the vacant Ring super middleweight championship.
Future: Following up career-defining win with October fight that won't even be televised in the U.S., against unheralded Sakio Bika. Talk about a momentum killer.

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES
Calzaghe on the attack against Lacy

6 MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA

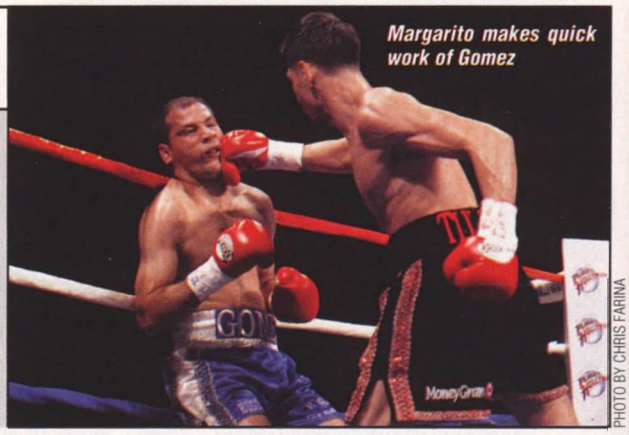
PHOTO COURTESY OF EVERLAST

11 SHANE MOSLEY Junior Middleweight 43-4 (37)

Last Year's Ranking: 17
Status Report: After repeatedly finding the wrong opponents (Vernon Forrest and Winky Wright), "Sugar Shane" finally found the right one, Fernando Vargas. With a 10th-round knockout and then a sixth-round kayo in the rematch, the latter one dominant and spectacular, the three-division former champ showed that he still has plenty left. He just needs to stay away from certain styles that neutralize his speed.
Future: Plans to take the rest of '06 off, and then return to the welterweight division. Though Sugar Shane's promoter, Oscar De La Hoya, gets first dibs on Floyd Mayweather, a Mayweather-Mosley match would also be huge.

12 ANTONIO MARGARITO Welterweight 33-4 (24) with 1 no-contest

Last Year's Ranking: 21
Status Report: Frozen out of the big fights, and shown a surprisingly small amount of interest by HBO, the California-based Mexican only fought once in the past year—and looked about as devastating as he possibly could, starching credible veteran contender Manuel Gomez in just 74 seconds.
Future: Since Floyd Mayweather spurned an $8-million offer to fight him, "Tono" has to think smaller, and will return to the ring on December 2, with Showtime televising. Decent Joshua Clottey looks like the frontrunner to face him.

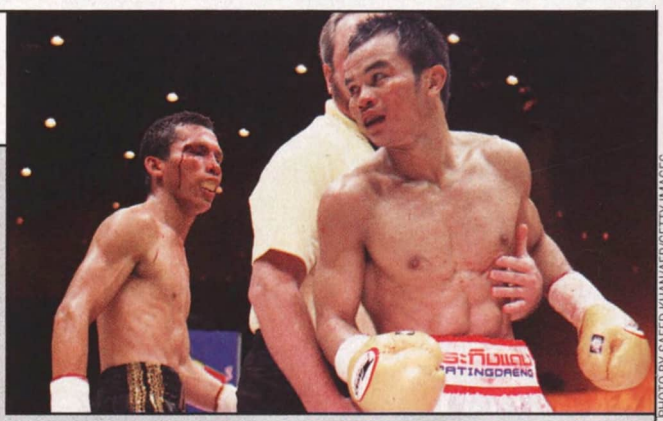

Margarito makes quick work of Gomez
PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

13 DIEGO CORRALES World Lightweight Champion 40-3 (33)

Last Year's Ranking: 8
Status Report: Not much has gone right for "Chico" since last we did these rankings: He got blown out by an overweight Jose Luis Castillo (KO by 4) in their rematch; had to postpone the rubber match due to a rib injury; and then had to cancel the rescheduled rubber match because Castillo was overweight again. To sum up, he's fought once in the past 12 months, and got drilled inside four rounds. But his P-4-P ranking doesn't suffer much because the loss was justifiable and he is still the lightweight champ.
Future: Fighting a different rubber match, against Joel Casamayor, in October.

14 PONGSAKLEK WONJONGKAM WBC Flyweight Titleholder 62-2 (32)

Last Year's Ranking: 22
Status Report: In an era when most top fighters compete only two or three times a year, Thai titlist has gone 6-0 since last year's "100," including four title defenses—against Daisuke Naito (Tech. Win 7), Gilberto Keb-Baas (W 12), Daigo Nakahiro (W 12), and Everardo Morales (KO 4). Now holds the record for consecutive successful flyweight title defenses, with 15. What the numbers don't show, however, is how ordinary the competition has been.
Future: Only 29 years old, there's still time to take on the division's best. Unfortunately, Pongsaklek seems to be satisfied doing what he's doing.


The ref pulls Wonjongkam away from bloody Morales
PHOTO BY SAEED KHAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

15 OSCAR DE LA HOYA WBC Super Welterweight Titleholder 38-4 (30)

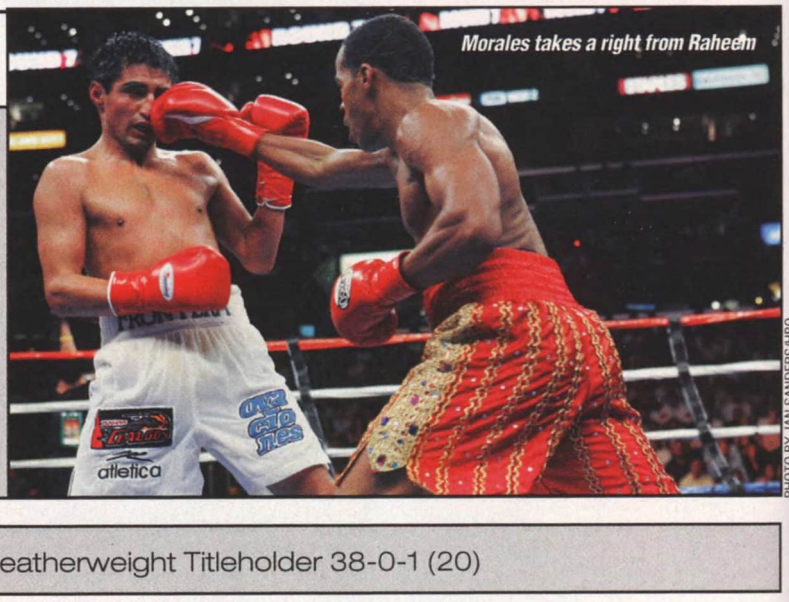
Last Year's Ranking: 18
Status Report: Yes, he's more promoter than fighter these days, but, as he showed against Ricardo Mayorga (KO 6), there's still plenty of fighter in him. We don't see that destructive, left-hooking bad-ass often—in fact, we don't see the inactive "Golden Boy" often at all these days—but it was good to have him back, even if only for one night.
Future: The only true PPV superstar in the game has reportedly decided to give us one last superfight on May 5, 2007. The options are to face either Felix Trinidad or Floyd Mayweather.

11 SUGAR SHANE MOSLEY

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

16 ERIK **MORALES**
Junior Lightweight 48-4 (34)

Last Year's Ranking: 4
Status Report: For a guy who had never previously lost a fight controversy-free, it was truly a disastrous year for "El Terrible," who suffered back-to-back defeats, one by knockout. First, fighting at too high a weight (134), the Mexican superstar was befuddled by Zahir Raheem (L 12), and then he was battered by a man he'd previously beaten, Manny Pacquiao (KO by 10).
Future: Just entering his 30s, the succession of bruising wars may have caught up with Morales. We'll find out for sure in his November rubber match with Pacquiao.



Morales takes a right from Raheem

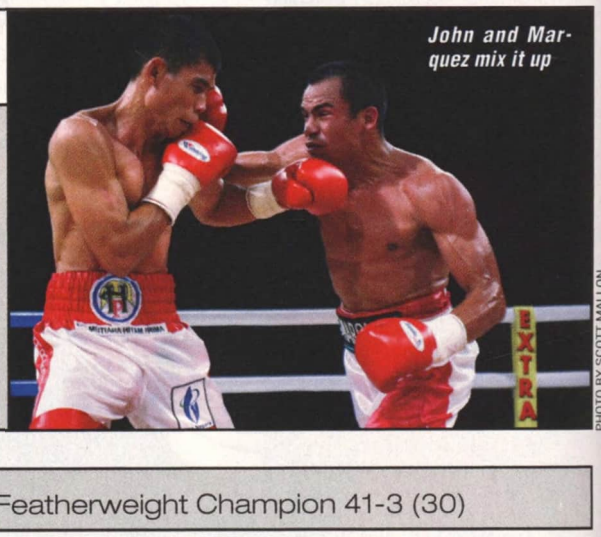
PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS/HBO

17 CHRIS **JOHN** WBA Featherweight Titleholder 38-0-1 (20)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Scored one of the biggest upsets of '06 when he handed Juan Manuel Marquez his first loss in more than six years to move to the top of the featherweight rankings. Some have called it a hometown decision for the Indonesian, but THE RING's reporter at ringside disagreed, believing "The Dragon" outboxed his foe. Also has comprehensive wins over Derrick Gainer and Ratanachai Vorapin on his resume, and followed up the Marquez win by beating unknown Renan Acosta (W 12).
Future: Nothing set as of press time, but don't expect a rematch with Marquez.

18 JUAN MANUEL **MARQUEZ**
Featherweight 45-3-1 (34)

Last Year's Ranking: 6
Status Report: Lost a lot of pound-for-pound ground with his surprise defeat to Chris John (L 12), but looked damned good in his comeback fight five months later, blowing out game but overmatched Terdsak Jandaeng (KO 7). As best we can tell, the mismanaged Mexican is still a threat to anyone at 126 or 130 pounds.
Future: Is in position to fight Scott Harrison, but given the Scot's personal problems, that may not happen. A rematch with Manny Pacquiao is still a possibility if and when Pac-Man runs out of bigger names to fight.



John and Marquez mix it up

PHOTO BY SCOTT MALLON

19 ISRAEL **VAZQUEZ** World Junior Featherweight Champion 41-3 (30)

Last Year's Ranking: 66
Status Report: "El Magnifico" lived up to his nickname, twice climbing off the canvas to stop Jhonny Gonzalez in the 10th round of a sensational battle in September. Vazquez' stock was already soaring following a third-round TKO of Oscar Larios last December to claim the vacant 122-pound RING title and a fourth-round kayo over undersized Ivan "Choko" Herenandez in his first defense. Now he's on the brink of becoming a superstar.
Future: May move up to the 126-pound division.

20 JOEL **CASAMAYOR** Lightweight 33-3-1 (21)

Last Year's Ranking: 20
Status Report: Cuban vet marked time the past year, keeping the rust off with wins over ordinary Antonio Ramirez (KO 5) and Lamont Pearson (KO 9), but not looking too sharp in the latter fight. Though perhaps slipping slightly at 35, "El Cepillo" is still not an easy out for anyone.
Future: Was scheduled for an October shot at Diego Corrales and the lightweight title, and can't afford another close loss or draw, as the hourglass is running out.

19 ISRAEL VAZQUEZ

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

21 LORENZO **PARRA** WBA Flyweight Titleholder 27-0 (17)

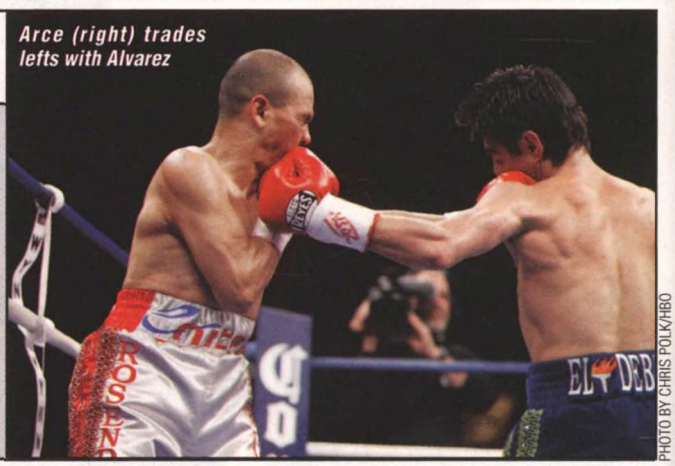
Last Year's Ranking: 28
Status Report: World-traveling Venezuelan continued taking his belt into enemy territory and outpointing the enemies, decisioning Takefumi Sakata in Tokyo and Brahim Asloum in Paris. The comprehensive win over Asloum, a previously undefeated Olympic gold medalist, was especially impressive.
Future: Junior fly beltholder Roberto Vasquez is moving up in weight to challenge him—and as always, Parra is heading to the other guy's home turf (in this case, Panama) to make it happen. For the real hard-core nuts that love the pint-sized foreigners, it doesn't get much better than this.

22 MIGUEL **COTTO** Junior Welterweight 27-0 (22)

Last Year's Ranking: 23
Status Report: In a year of uneven performances, one thing remained consistent about Puerto Rican star: He kept winning. Got off the canvas twice to beat Ricardo Torres (KO 7), had his way with light-hitting Gianluca Branco (KO 8), and then struggled a bit more than expected but ultimately put a beating on Paulie Malignaggi (W 12).
Future: Seems to have outgrown the 140-pound division before he could score a huge fight there, and will make his welterweight debut in December.

23 JORGE **ARCE** Flyweight 44-3-1 (34)

Last Year's Ranking: 33
Status Report: A massive flyweight with youth and skill to complement his overwhelming size, "El Travieso" had a career-best year, blowing out Hussein Hussein (KO 2) in a rematch to a tough fight, twice stopping Adonis Rivas (KO 10, KO 6), and becoming the first to stop the outstanding (but aging) Rosendo Alvarez (KO 6).
Future: After six total fights in the division, has outgrown the 112-pound class and had his junior bantamweight debut scheduled against Hawk Makepula. Sadly, this means sensational matches against flyweights Pongsaklek Wonjongkam and Vic Darchinyan may never happen.


Arce (right) trades lefts with Alvarez
PHOTO BY CHRIS POLK/HBO

24 KASSIM **OUMA** Junior Middleweight 25-2-1 (15) with 1 no-contest

Last Year's Ranking: 35
Status Report: Bounced back well from upset loss to Roman Karmazin just before last year's press deadline, winning four straight against gradually better opposition. Easily handled Freddy Cuevas (KO 4) and Francisco Mora (KO 8), got off the canvas to outpoint Marco Antonio Rubio (W 12), and then overwhelmed Sechew Powell (W 10) with volume to hand the New Yorker his first loss. Despite loss to Karmazin, may be best fighter at 154 pounds.
Future: We know what he can do at 154 … what about at 160? We'll find out when he takes on Jermain Taylor.

25 CARLOS **BALDOMIR** World Welterweight Champion 43-9-6 (13)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: If someone had told you a year ago that the Argentine would be where he now is, you'd have had that person fit for a straitjacket. Though seemingly just another fraudulent alphabet mandatory, he scored what is to this point the Upset of the Year against Zab Judah (W 12) at Madison Square Garden in January to claim the only true 147-pound title, then turned away Arturo Gatti (KO 9) six months later.
Future: The most unlikely part of all, compared to a year ago: Baldomir is scheduled to fight Floyd Mayweather in November—and most experts don't consider it a total mismatch.

Baldomir shocks Judah and the boxing world
PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

22 MIGUEL COTTO

The Ring 100

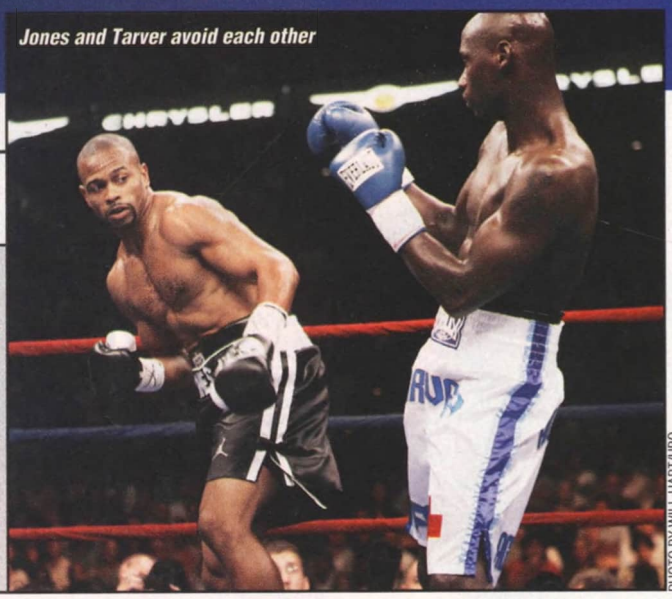

Jones and Tarver avoid each other

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

26 ANTONIO **TARVER** Light Heavyweight 24-4 (18)

Last Year's Ranking: 24
Last Year's Ranking: 11
Status Report: In another place and time, having a year in which you go 1-1 against Roy Jones and Bernard Hopkins wouldn't hurt your P-4-P placement at all. But to look so shaky in beating a faded Jones (W 12) and to bring absolutely nothing to the dance against a 41-year-old Hopkins (L 12) equates to a pretty lousy year. Maybe making 175 pounds is taking its toll on "The Magic Man" … or maybe being 37 years old is.
Future: Now that he's negotiated his way out of a fight with Jeff Lacy, perhaps a try at cruiserweight makes sense.

27 ZAB **JUDAH** Welterweight 34-4 (25) with 1 no-contest

Last Year's Ranking: 12
Status Report: Just when the Brooklyn southpaw seemed to have finally put it all together, it all fell apart. Lost welterweight championship in major upset against Carlos Baldomir (L 12), started well but faded against Floyd Mayweather (L 12), and then got suspended for a year by the Nevada Athletic Commission for his role in a fracas that broke out during the Mayweather fight. Turns out the new, "mature" Judah is indistinguishable from the old, immature one.
Future: Maybe his forced vacation will give him the perspective he needs to come back a better fighter. *Maybe.*

28 MIKKEL **KESSLER** WBA Super Middleweight Titleholder 37-0 (28)

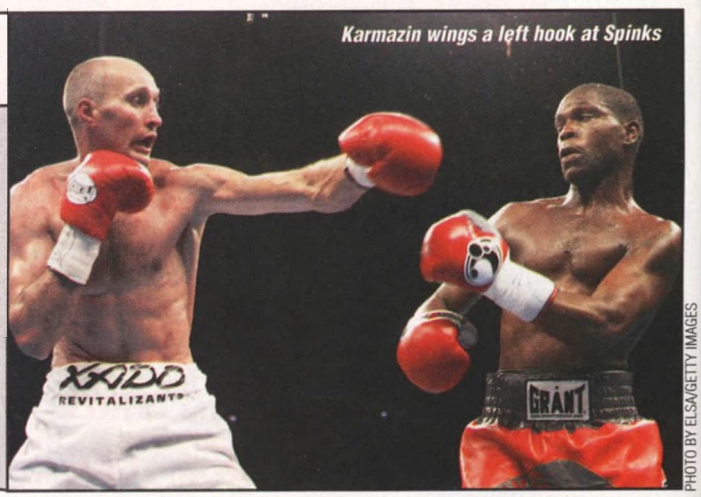
Last Year's Ranking: 39
Status Report: Not quite the busiest of years for Danish beltholder, but in his lone outing, he was his usual dominant self, winning every round on every scorecard en route to stopping former titlist Eric Lucas (KO 10).
Future: Scheduled for October fight against WBC counterpart Markus Beyer, and if Kessler wins (as he is firmly favored to), a showdown with Joe Calzaghe becomes an essential bout for hardcore fans. Unfortunately, there's some talk of the winner fighting Lucian Bute instead.

29 CORY **SPINKS** IBF Junior Middleweight Titleholder 35-3 (11)

Last Year's Ranking: 25
Status Report: Spent 17 months on the shelf after losing the welterweight championship to Zab Judah, then returned to action by taking on the top-rated junior middleweight, Roman Karmazin, and pulling off a majority decision victory. "The Next Generation" boxed his way to an early lead, then almost ran his way to defeat, only to hear the narrow decision announced in his favor.
Future: May make a mandatory defense against Rodney Jones. It's going to take several espressos to keep us awake through that one.

30 ROMAN **KARMAZIN** Junior Middleweight 34-2-1 (21)

Last Year's Ranking: 34
Status Report: Failed to build upon the momentum of his upset win over Kassim Ouma, spending a full year inactive afterward and then losing in his first title defense, against Cory Spinks (L 12). But the razor-close nature of the defeat, which saw the Russian dominate the final few rounds, diminishes the blow somewhat. Even in losing, he proved he's a tough foe for anyone at 154.
Future: We could see the awkward Karmazin being ducked for a while. Spinks ought to give him a rematch, but we wouldn't blame Spinks if he didn't.



Karmazin wings a left hook at Spinks

PHOTO BY ELSA/GETTY IMAGES

28 MIKKEL KESSLER

PHOTO BY TORSTEN BLACKWOOD/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

31 MASAMORI TOKUYAMA
WBC Super Flyweight Titleholder
32-3-1 (8)

Last Year's Ranking: 49
Status Report: Now in his second title reign, Japan-based Korean strongly suggested his first-round kayo loss to Katsushige Kawashima a couple of years ago was a fluke by comprehensively outboxing well-regarded American Jose Navarro (W 12). Win raised record in title fights to 11-1 (3).
Future: Recovering from a right shoulder injury suffered in a car accident, but is targeting bantam beltholder Hozumi Hasegawa upon his return.

Tokuyama jabs at Navarro in rematch

PHOTO BY AFP PHOTO/JIJI PRESS/GETTY IMAGES

32 HUMBERTO SOTO Featherweight 40-5-2 (24) with 1 no-contest

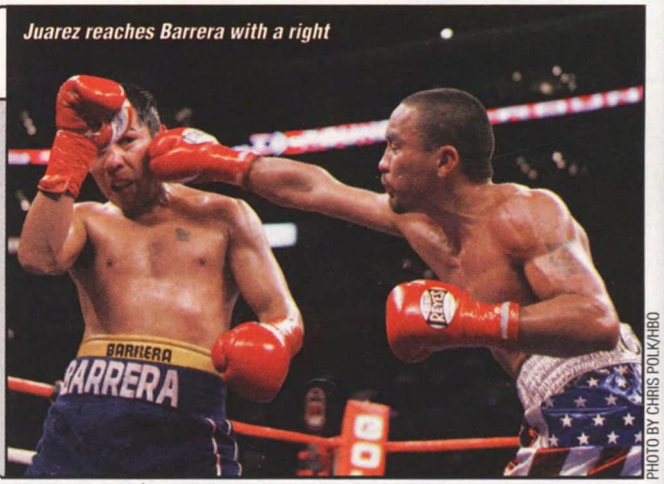
Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: How different his life would be if Injin Chi had remained healthy … Mexican got the call as a late sub against Rocky Juarez on HBO last August, and delivered an outstanding performance, winning a close but clear-cut decision to hand the rising contender his first defeat. Has kept busy since with a meaningless win against Ulises Duarte (KO 1) and quality wins against Oscar Leon (KO 9) and Ivan Valle (KO 4).
Future: Willing to fight at either 126 or 130 pounds. Certainly seems worthy of a crack at Marco Antonio Barrera.

33 JUAN DIAZ WBA Lightweight Titleholder 30-0 (15)

Last Year's Ranking: 63
Status Report: There was almost nothing to criticize in successful alphabet title defenses against Jose Miguel Cotto (W 12) and Randy Suico (KO 9)—except that they both came on pay-per-view undercards and were seen by relatively limited audiences. At 22, "The Baby Bull" has matured into a man in the ring, mixing an outstanding variety of punches, better defense than he gets credit for, and exceptional conditioning.
Future: Signed promotional contract with Don King as we went to press.

34 ROCKY JUAREZ
Junior Lightweight 25-3 (18)

Last Year's Ranking: 64
Status Report: How does a fighter climb 30 spots in a year in which he suffers his first three defeats? By having one of them be a controversial split decision to one of the absolute best fighters in the world, Marco Antonio Barrera. Upset loss to Humberto Soto (L 12) hurt the 2000 Olympian—though it was an outstanding fight, at least. Texan bounced back with two easy kayo wins prior to first Barrera defeat, but was then thoroughly outboxed in the rematch.
Future: Must regroup and start winning again if he's not to suffer significant plunge in next year's RING 100. Suggestion: Stop waiting for the perfect opening before unleashing devastating left hook.



Juarez reaches Barrera with a right

PHOTO BY CHRIS POLK/HBO

35 JESUS CHAVEZ IBF Lightweight Titleholder 43-3 (30)

Last Year's Ranking: 32
Status Report: "El Matador," who famously spent a couple of key years of his career unable to enter the U.S., is turning into one of the true hard-luck fighters of his time. His victory over Leavander Johnson last September turned into the worst night of his career when Johnson died shortly thereafter, and Chavez hasn't fought since due to arm injuries.
Future: May face Julio Diaz if and when the arm is fully healed. How Chavez' psyche will heal remains to be seen.

33 JUAN DIAZ

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

36 OSCAR **LARIOS** Junior Lightweight 56-5-1 (36)

Last Year's Ranking: 19
Status Report: After a five-year, 17-fight unbeaten streak, "Chololo" experienced a momentum reversal, going 0-2 in the past year. Got dropped and stopped on cuts against Israel Vazquez (KO by 3) last December in a bid for the vacant RING 122-pound title, then moved up two weight divisions to challenge Manny Pacquiao and, despite some good moments, lost a one-sided 12-round decision.
Future: As he's outgrown 122 pounds but may be out of his depth against the elite 130-pounders, the 126-pound division—which isn't particularly deep with talent—would probably be a good place for the Mexican to get back on track.

37 NOBUO **NASHIRO** WBA Super Flyweight Titleholder 8-0 (5)

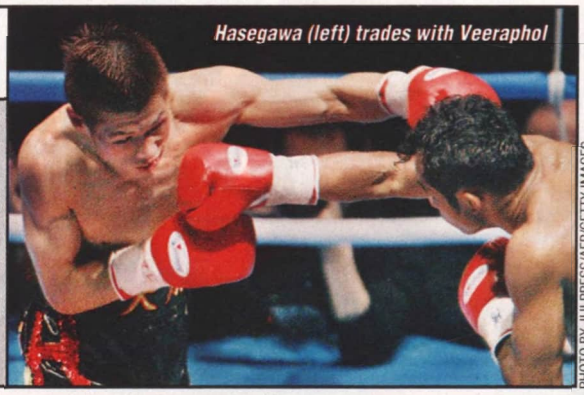
Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Considering that Martin Castillo was considered by most to be the world's premier 115-pounder, it was especially surprising—and impressive—that a fighter with only seven previous pro bouts to his name defeated him. The 24-year-old Japanese challenger boxed on even terms with the skillful Mexican and won on cuts in the 10th, shaking up the junior bantam division.
Future: A unification bout with Masamori Tokuyama would be big in Japan—and would crown a RING champion.

38 MARTIN **CASTILLO** Junior Bantamweight 30-2 (16)

Last Year's Ranking: 24
Status Report: After narrowly outpointing Alexander Munoz by split decision in January, couldn't manage another narrow escape in his next fight, losing his belt six months later to unknown Nobuo Nashiro in Japan on a 10th-round stoppage due to a severe cut over his left eye. Both of Castillo's two career losses have been prompted by cuts.
Future: Will probably need some time for the wound to heal, but when it does, deserves another crack at Nashiro.

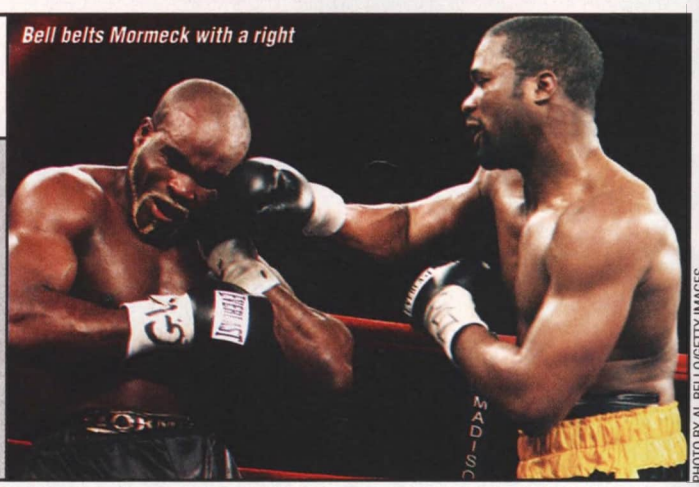
39 HOZUMI **HASEGAWA** WBC Bantamweight Titleholder 20-2 (7)

Last Year's Ranking: 43
Status Report: Followed upset title win over long-reigning Veerapol Sahaprom with a pair of defenses: a one-sided spanking of mediocre Gerardo Martinez (KO 7), and a destructive rematch kayo of Veerapol (KO 9). Hasn't lost since his fifth pro bout, but until he faces another top bantam, we won't know for sure if he's that good or if Veerapol had simply grown old.
Future: Division is wide open with Rafael Marquez leaving, and Hasegawa has as good a shot as anyone at taking control.


Hasegawa (left) trades with Veeraphol
PHOTO BY JIJI PRESS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

40 O'NEIL **BELL** World Cruiserweight Champion 26-1-1 (24)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Looked like a longshot to topple cruiserweight king Jean-Marc Mormeck in January, but outlasted and out-toughed the Frenchman en route to a 10th-round kayo win. Five months earlier, came from behind to starch Sebastian Rothmann (KO 11), displaying his excellent late-round power.
Future: Wanted to take an intriguing fight with Chris Byrd, but the networks showed little interest, and the WBC mandated that he give Mormeck a rematch, so it looks like that's what we'll get.


Bell belts Mormeck with a right
PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

38 MARTIN CASTILLO

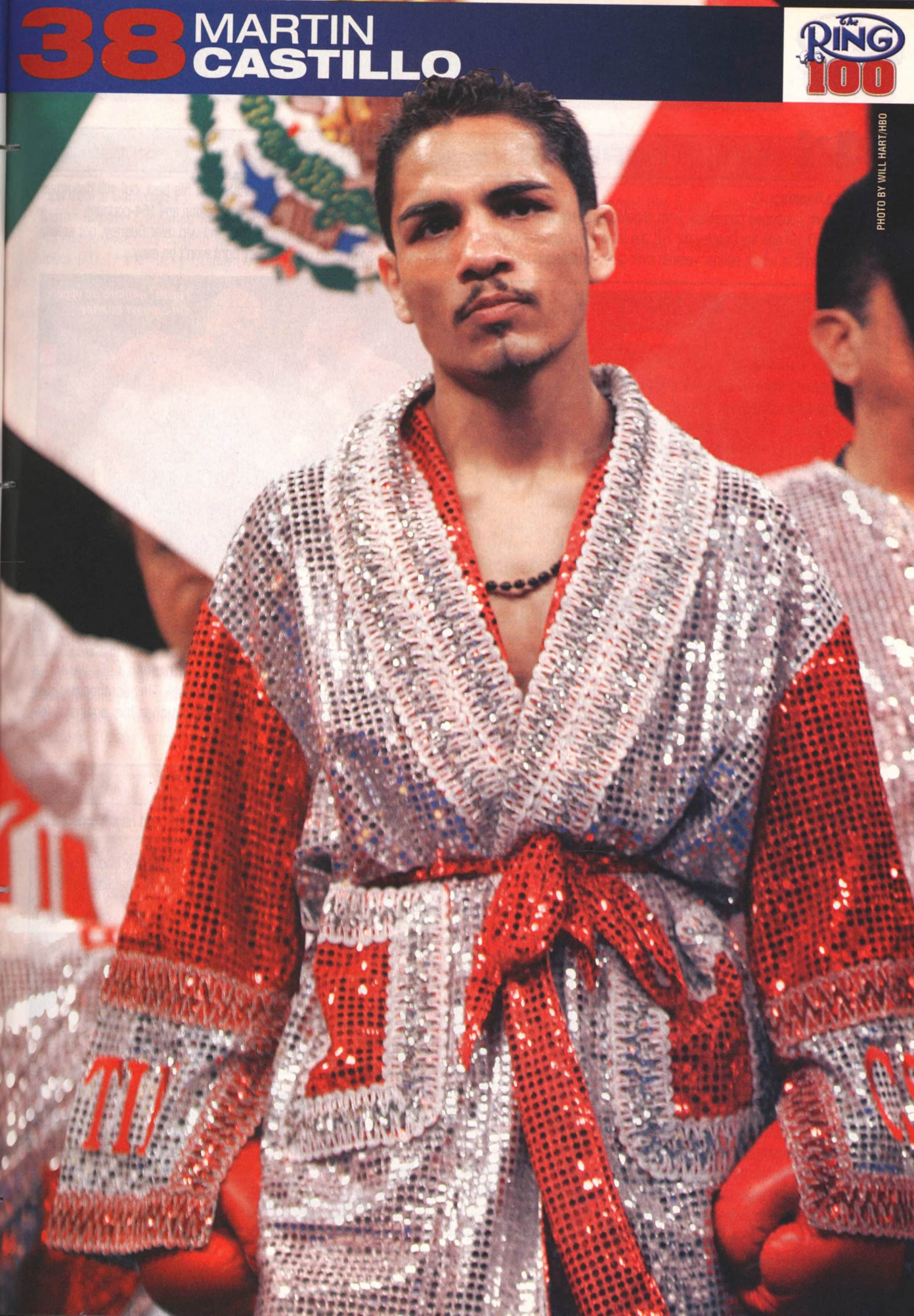


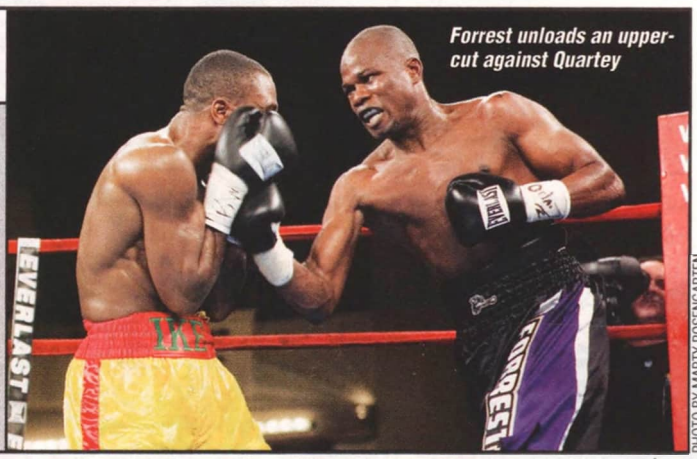
PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

41 VERNON **FORREST** Junior Middleweight 38-2 (28) with 1 no-contest

Last Year's Ranking: 41
Status Report: Continued comeback from shoulder surgery with wins over Elco Garcia (KO 10) and Ike Quartey (W 10), the latter an unpopular decision after a close fight in which neither veteran ever quite established control. At 35, former welterweight king is probably past his best, but still dangerous enough as both a boxer and a puncher to threaten any 154-pounder.
Future: Despite outstanding credentials and win over Quartey, not exactly a fan favorite, so landing a big-money fight won't be easy.

42 IKE **QUARTEY** Junior Middleweight 37-3-1 (31)

Last Year's Ranking: 40
Status Report: Many in attendance and watching on HBO thought he got the better of Vernon Forrest in August, but the judges disagreed, handing the Ghanaian a unanimous-decision loss. In his previous fight, in December '05, bludgeoned Carlos Bojorquez (KO 10), dominating the journeyman as expected.
Future: Hard-luck loss to Forrest shouldn't slow momentum much, if at all. "Bazooka" is probably headed for a fight with Winky Wright. Wanna bet somebody complains about the decision afterward?



Forrest unloads an uppercut against Quartey
PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

43 IVAN **CALDERON** Strawweight 26-0 (6)

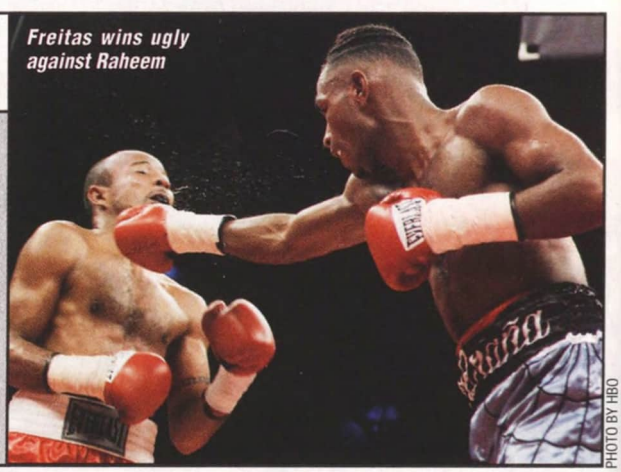
Last Year's Ranking: 84
Status Report: Still hasn't faced a first-rate, prime opponent, but through consistency and activity, has gained general recognition as the top 105-pounder in the world. This past year saw the slick Puerto Rican shut out two more fading ex-titlists, Daniel Reyes and Isaac Bustos, and then score a rare kayo of anonymous Miguel Tellez (KO 9).
Future: Scheduled for October bout with Jose Luis Varela, a Colombian with little in the way of credentials. Tiny southpaw is now 31 years old, and it's high time Top Rank matches him against a fellow titleholder.

44 VIC **DARCHINYAN** IBF Flyweight Titleholder 26-0 (21)

Last Year's Ranking: 58
Status Report: Scored three quality kayos since last "RING 100," furthering reputation as one of the best punchers, pound-for-pound, in the game today. Heavy-handed, fearless Australian's victims included Jair Jimenez (KO 5), Diosdado Gabi (KO 8), and Luis Maldonado (KO 8), the latter two coming on Showtime. Is now 5-0 (5) in title fights and hasn't gone the distance in more than three years.
Future: As of press time, under consideration for another Showtime fight in October. Too bad Jorge Arce has moved up in weight; that could've been a scorcher.

45 ROBERTO **VASQUEZ** WBA Light Flyweight Titleholder 22-1 (17)

Last Year's Ranking: 69
Status Report: Validated title-winning effort against Beibis Mendoza with a trio of successful defenses, against former 105-pound king Jose Antonio Aguirre (KO 4), Nerys Espinosa (W 12), and another former strawweight beltholder, Noel Arambulet (W 12). All-action Panamanian was knocked down in both the Aguirre and Espinosa fights, but won all three bouts handily.
Future: Obviously not afraid of a challenge, as he's moving up four pounds to challenge undefeated Lorenzo Parra for a flyweight belt in October. Should be a doozy.


Freitas wins ugly against Raheem
PHOTO BY HBO

46 JULIO DIAZ Lightweight 33-3 (24)

Last Year's Ranking: 71
Status Report: Continued measured comeback from painful March '05 loss to Jose Luis Castillo with a pair of wins over Russell Stoner Jones (KO 1) and Ricky Quiles (W 12). Boxed beautifully against Quiles, winning nearly every round.
Future: Quiles fight earned him a silly interim title, but the not-so-silly part is that it means a fight with Jesus Chavez for the full title awaits. The bout could happen in November, and has Fight of the Year potential.

47 ACELINO FREITAS Lightweight 38-1 (32)

Last Year's Ranking: 42
Status Report: Not the busiest of years for "Popo," who fought only once since last year's "100"—and we use the word "fought" very loosely. Split decision win over Zahir Raheem in April was utterly unwatchable, just a terrible clash of styles between two guys reluctant to take chances. On the plus side, Raheem is a quality fighter, and the Brazilian did get the win.
Future: Will mark time late in the year against a soft opponent, then it may be on to something bigger (the Corrales-Casamayor III winner, Juan Diaz) to kick off '07.

Erdei pops Sahnoune with a right

PHOTO BY CHRISTIAM FISCHER/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

48 VERNO PHILLIPS Junior Middleweight 40-10-1 (21) with 1 no-contest

Last Year's Ranking: 46
Status Report: After back-to-back quality losses against Kassim Ouma and Ike Quartey, returned with back-to-back quality wins against J.C. Candelo (W 10) and Teddy Reid (KO 12). Despite his age (36) and lengthy resume, still had enough in the tank to beat both fringe contenders handily.
Future: Too good for the ESPN2 circuit, not quite good enough for the HBO/Showtime circuit, Denver veteran is in a tough spot. Hopefully he'll get one more shot on HBO. Phillips-Quartey II or Phillips-Forrest, anyone?

49 ZSOLT ERDEI Light Heavyweight 25-0 (15)

Last Year's Ranking: 60
Status Report: Made fourth, fifth, and sixth defenses of fringe 175-pound title, two of them easy, one of them not. The easy ones came against little known Paul Murdoch (KO 10) and solid Thomas Ulrich (W 12). The scare came against Frenchman Mehdi Sahnoune, who gave the Hungarian hell before falling in the 12th round of an even fight.
Future: Clever boxer can go the Dariusz Michalczewski route—keep scoring wins over second-tier contenders in Germany until age catches up to him—but our hope is that he'll start itching to make a statement soon.

Johnson (right) fends off Woods' attack

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

50 CLINTON WOODS IBF Light Heavyweight Titleholder 40-3-1 (24)

Last Year's Ranking: 90
Status Report: Was expected to go quietly against former undisputed champion Glen Johnson in September (having already lost once to Johnson and been handed a gift draw in their other fight), but instead, the Brit rallied late and scored the upset win via split decision. Prior to that career-best victory, defeated ordinary Jason DeLisle (KO 6) in May and earned a quality win over Julio Gonzalez (W 12) in September '05.
Future: There's talk of Joe Calzaghe moving up to light heavyweight to face him, which would be a superfight in Britain. A rematch with Roy Jones, who stopped him four years ago, is also possible.

51 GLEN **JOHNSON**
Light Heavyweight 44-11-2 (29)

Last Year's Ranking: 15
Status Report: Seemed to be chugging his way back toward the top with solid wins over fringe contenders George Jones (KO 10) and Richard Hall (W 12), but got tripped up by Clinton Woods in September, losing a split decision in England in a bid to reclaim an alphabet belt that had been ridiculously stripped from "The Road Warrior" a couple of years prior.
Future: The 175-pound division is wide open, but Johnson now has to get in line behind a couple of other fighters. At age 37, this debatable loss to Woods was a costly one.

Johnson (right) fends off Woods' attack

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

52 JOAN **GUZMAN** Junior Lightweight 26-0 (17)

Last Year's Ranking: 75
Status Report: Dominican's once-noteworthy knockout power has diminished as he's moved up in weight (he's now gone the distance five straight times), but in his decision victory over Jorge Barrios he showed that there's much more to his game than just power. Defeated two solid foes in Terdsak Jandaeng (W 12) and Javier Jauregui (W 10) before high-profile victory over Barrios.
Future: "Little Tyson's" win over Barrios means he's ready for the division's elite.

53 SOMSAK **SITHCHATCHAWAL**
WBA Super Bantamweight Titleholder 46-1-1 (37) with 1 no-contest

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: After years of feasting on completely anonymous opposition in Thailand, claimed alphabet belt with sensational win over Mahyar Monshipour (KO 10) in March, a back-and-forth war that is almost certain to end up being named 2006's Fight of the Year. Wiry Thai showed heart, power, and tremendous conditioning in dethroning the gutsy beltholder.
Future: First defense, against "interim" titlist Celestino Caballero, no gimme. Should be interesting to see if he can sustain his success taking on world-class opponents one after another.

54 LUIS **COLLAZO**
Welterweight 26-2 (12)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Second career loss rates unofficially as best career "win," as he dropped a debatable decision to Ricky Hatton following an entertaining fight in which the heavily tattooed New Yorker nearly kayoed the 2005 Fighter of the Year in round 12. Prior to that, looked good in winning a fairly meaningless fight against used-up Miguel Angel Gonzalez (KO 8).
Future: An autumn bout with Carlos Quintana (conqueror of Joel Julio) is being discussed, and makes sense, with both coming off of breakthrough performances.

Collazo connects with Hatton's jaw

PHOTO BY NICK LAHAM/GETTY IMAGES

55 ZAHIR **RAHEEM** Lightweight 27-2 (16)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Talk about an up-and-down year. Philly slickster turned in an "A+" performance in unanimously outpointing Erik Morales last September, then followed with a "D-" showing in dropping a horrifically ugly split decision to Acelino Freitas in April. Against the right style, Raheem can look magnificent, but we don't ever want to see him against the wrong style again.
Future: Just one bout removed from spanking Morales, he seems to have almost no chance at landing a big fight. Even though Freitas was awful too, "Z-Man" is absorbing most of the punishment in the media.

56 JUNIOR **WITTER** WBC Junior Welterweight Titleholder 34-1-2 (19)

Last Year's Ranking: 50
Status Report: After a ho-hum year, "The Hitter" has the potential to get some hum going now that he's beaten DeMarcus Corley (W 12) to claim the vacant WBC belt. Prior to that, only fought once in the last 12 months, a close 12-round unanimous decision over relative unknown Colin Lynes.
Future: The victory over Corley could renew buzz for all-England showdown with Ricky Hatton.

57 EDWIN **VALERO** WBA Super Featherweight Titleholder 20-0 (20)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Venezuelan phenom's remarkable streak of first-round knockouts ended at 18, but his any-round knockout streak was extended to 20 with alphabet title victory over Panama's Vicente Mosquera (KO 10) in August. One of the hardest punchers in the sport, though critics say power has gone to the 24-year-old's head and his boxing skills have been diminishing.
Future: Not allowed to fight in the U.S. due to a failed brain scan (the result of a motorcycle accident), so it won't be easy for him to become a major star in America. But the buzz surrounding him is tremendous.

PHOTO BY ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Unbeaten Valero tears into Mosquera with a left

58 YUTAKA **NIIDA** WBA Minimumweight Titleholder 20-1-3 (8)

Last Year's Ranking: 62
Status Report: Scored the third and fourth defenses of his second 105-pound title reign, turning back previously unbeaten Eriberto Gejon (Tech. Win 10) and once-beaten Ronald Barrera (W 12) in a pair of close bouts on home turf in Japan. Was slated to make a third defense in September, against former beltholder Katsunari Takayama, but suffered a rib injury in sparring and had to postpone the fight.
Future: Bout against Japanese compatriot Takayama will likely be rescheduled once titleholder is fully healed.

59 JHONNY **GONZALEZ** Junior Featherweight 33-5 (28)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: After a rocky start to a pro career that began at age 17, Mexican really began to break through in '05 and '06, defeating William Gonzalez (KO 3) in a corker, Ratanachai Vorapin (KO 7) to snag a belt, and big names Mark Johnson (KO 8) and Fernando Montiel (W 12). But a crushing TKO loss to Israel Vazquez in a fight Gonzalez was winning has set him back a bit.
Future: The exciting loss doesn't hurt too much, but it sure didn't help. It's pretty clear, however, that his days as a 118-pounder, where he had campaigned until the Vazquez bout, are over.

Gonzalez drills Montiel with a right

PHOTO BY SUMIO YAMADA

60 JUAN **LAZCANO** Junior Welterweight 36-3-1 (27)

Last Year's Ranking: 55
Status Report: Following a 14-month layoff to recuperate mentally and physically from loss to lightweight champ Jose Luis Castillo, "The Hispanic Causing Panic" got busy with three decisive wins at a higher weight, over Marco Angel Perez (KO 1), Courtney Burton (KO 9), and Ben Tackie (W 10). It remains to be seen, however, what the former 135-pound contender can do against a world-rated junior welterweight.
Future: Never in a bad fight, we'd be eager to see him in with any top 140-pounder (except maybe Castillo again).

61 SERGEI **DZINDZIRUK** Junior Middleweight 32-0 (21)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: After facing a steady diet of nobodies for six years (faded versions of Andrei Pestriaev and Mamadou Thiam were the best names on his record), stepped up and stunned Daniel Santos via unanimous 12-round decision, scoring a knockdown in the eighth. Ukrainian southpaw followed with a solid win over Sebastian Lujan (W 12) in May.
Future: We'd like to see him venture outside Europe, but Dzindziruk's people have yet to show any interest in making it happen. He's based in Germany, where they often tend to milk their titles against safer opponents as long as they can.

PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN FISCHER/GETTY IMAGES

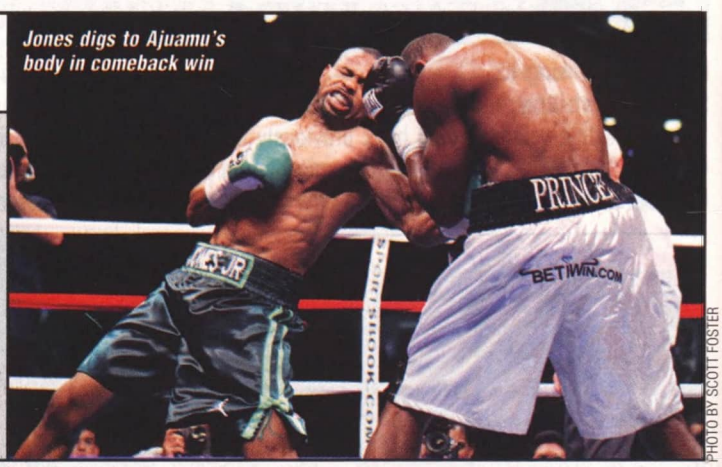
Dzindziruk rocks Santos

62 JORGE **BARRIOS** Junior Lightweight 46-3-1 (33) with 1 no-contest

Last Year's Ranking: 86
Status Report: Wacky Argentine dropped an entertaining 12-rounder to Joan Guzman after losing his alphabet belt at the scales. Prior to that, he'd added to his resume with one-sided wins over Victor Santiago (KO 2), Nazareno Ruiz (W 10), and Janos Nagy (KO 1). Nagy victory came in high-profile HBO bout, courtesy of a perfectly delivered bodyshot.
Future: Will probably move up to lightweight, if not junior welter.

63 ROY **JONES** Light Heavyweight 50-4 (38)

Last Year's Ranking: 61
Status Report: Last year, it was tough to figure out where to rank the fading future Hall of Famer. But after the evidence presented this year, it seems we had it just about right. Looked shaky but not quite shot in rubber match with Antonio Tarver (L 12), then looked in fair form against overmatched Prince Badi Ajamu (W 12).
Future: Reportedly targeting a rematch with Clinton Woods. That would certainly give us a clear picture of where the former champ stands compared to a few years ago.



Jones digs to Ajuamu's body in comeback win

PHOTO BY SCOTT FOSTER

64 CARLOS **HERNANDEZ** Junior Lightweight 42-6-1 (24)

Last Year's Ranking: 53
Status Report: "Famoso" is turning into a real hard-luck warrior—and at age 35, he'd better turn that luck around soon. Following his could-have-gone-either-way split decision loss to Jesus Chavez, suffered a split decision loss to Bobby Pacquiao last October that was a flat-out robbery. Took nine months off, then dominated Canadian clubfighter Sean Plessis (W 10).
Future: Was scheduled to face (and almost certainly defeat) Kevin Kelley after our press deadline. A rematch with Steve Forbes, whom he defeated in '03, would certainly be a marketable option.

65 ARTHUR **ABRAHAM** IBF Middleweight Titleholder 21-0 (17)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: After emerging as a real player with victory over Howard Eastman last July, reeled off four strong wins, against Luis Parada (KO 5), Kingsley Ikeke (KO 5), Shannan Taylor (W 12), and Kofi Jantuah (W 12). The Ikeke fight earned the 26-year-old Germany-based Armenian the vacant IBF trinket.
Future: Was slated for September title defense against Edison Miranda, a fantastic matchup of undefeated up-and-comers.

65 ARTHUR ABRAHAM

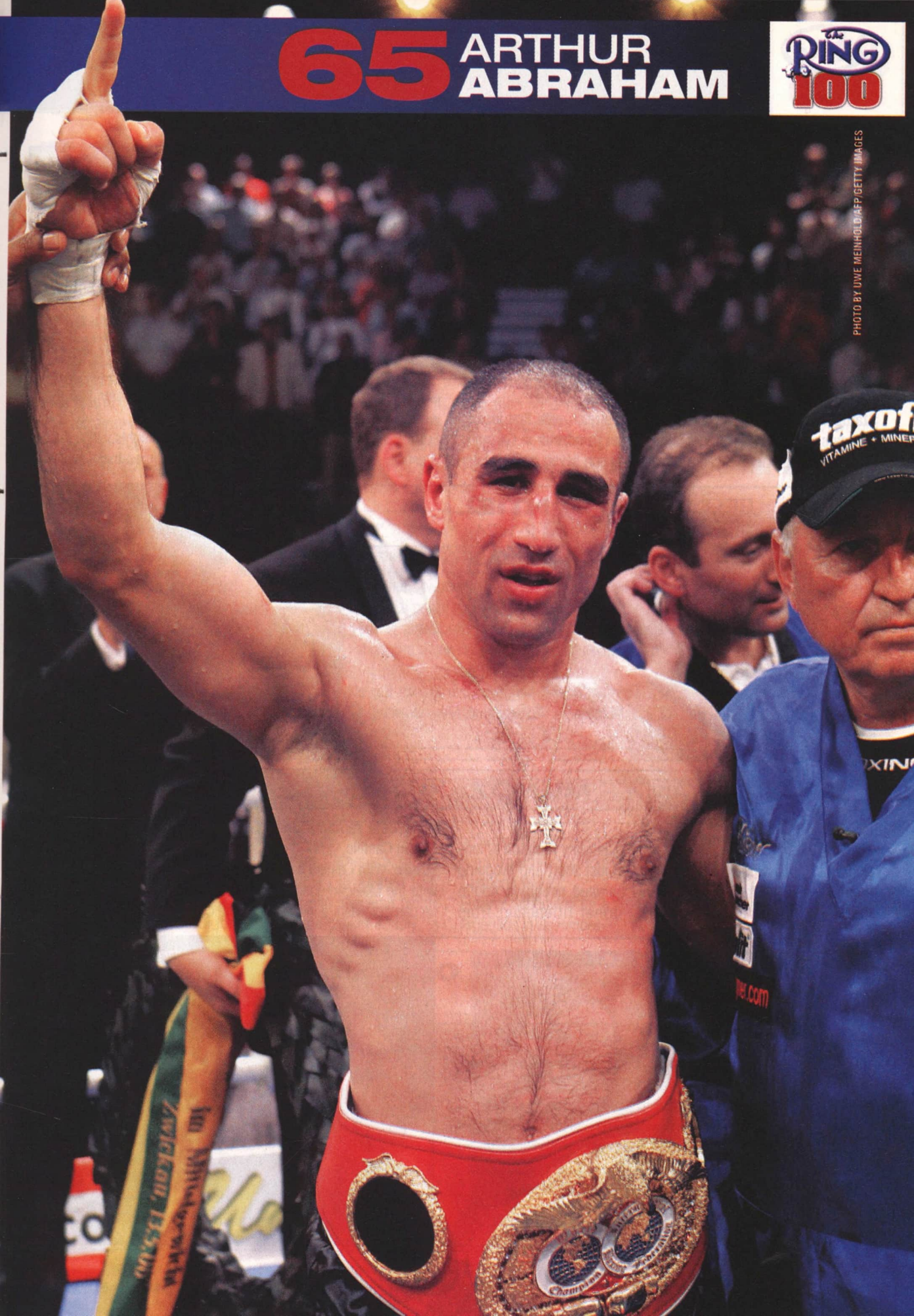


PHOTO BY UWE MEINHOLD/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

66 LUIS **PEREZ** IBF Junior Bantamweight Titleholder 24-1 (15)

Last Year's Ranking: 48
Status Report: We haven't seen a beltholder this inactive since Jess Willard. Once-a-year (or less) defense schedule continued over the past 12 months, as "El Demoledor" fought just a single time, winning a controversial split decision over Dimitri Kirilov in May. Rust played a factor, as Nicaraguan started slow and struggled with his timing throughout the fight.
Future: Earth to Don King: You aren't going to make any money with this guy if he doesn't fight. King reportedly passed on a Perez-Jose Navarro *Boxing After Dark* fight and has him penciled in to defend against Tomas Rojas in Phoenix, Arizona, on November 4, instead. Go figure.

67 DANIEL **SANTOS** Junior Middleweight 30-3-1 (21) with 1 no-contest

Last Year's Ranking: 51
Status Report: Ended 15-month inactive stretch with first loss in six years, a close decision defeat to Sergei Dzindziruk in Germany last December. Puerto Rican returned to action seven months later with a meaningless 52-second kayo of .500 fighter Will Evans, which is certainly better than not fighting at all.
Future: Without a belt, will have trouble finding fights, since his style is usually not crowd-pleasing and he's a sometimes-tricky southpaw.

68 FERNANDO **MONTIEL** Junior Bantamweight 32-2-1 (24)

Last Year's Ranking: 54
Status Report: Fancy-boxing Mexican had a disappointing year, narrowly defeating Pramuansak Posuwan (W 12) to defend his 115-pound bauble, then taking a shot at bantamweight beltholder Jhonny Gonzalez (L 12) and delivering a lackluster performance. He's a beautiful stylist when he's on his game, but inconsistency is proving to be a big problem.
Future: The failed bantamweight experiment behind him, promoter Golden Boy is looking at junior bantam unification against Masamori Tokuyama or Nobuo Nashiro.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO
Montiel busts Briceno in the mouth

69 ALEXANDER **MUNOZ** Junior Bantamweight 28-2 (26)

Last Year's Ranking: 67
Status Report: Acquitted himself well in January rematch to lopsided loss against Martin Castillo, falling just short and dropping a split decision. Prior to that, easily handled neophyte Adolfo Ramos (KO 1) in a tuneup bout. Former titleholder from Venezuela remains undefeated against everyone not named Martin Castillo.
Future: With Castillo having just lost to Nobuo Nashiro, a third fight with the Mexican doesn't make much sense right now. But maybe he can get Nashiro in the ring while Castillo heals from his cuts.

70 TOMASZ **ADAMEK** WBC Light Heavyweight Titleholder 30-0 (21)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Following his spectacular, bloody, majority decision win over Paul Briggs to snag a vacant 175-pound belt in May '05, solidified his standing with impressive sixth-round knockout of decent Thomas Ulrich in October. Unfortunately, the talented Pole went nearly a full year without fighting after that, and grew so frustrated he sued promoter Don King for not lining up a fight for him.
Future: HBO-televised rematch with Briggs will be history by the time you read this.

Adamek rocks Ulrich en route to sixth-round kayo
PHOTO BY MARTIN ROSE/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

71 VIVIAN **HARRIS** Junior Welterweight 27-2-1 (18)

Last Year's Ranking: 77
Status Report: Rebounded from devastating stamina-related loss to Carlos Maussa with a pair of wins, handling spoiler Marteze Logan (W 10) and faded former lightweight king Stevie Johnston (KO 7). The awful defeat to Maussa may have tricked some people into overlooking "Vicious Vivian," but make no mistake, this long-armed boxer-puncher is a dangerous opponent for anyone at 140 pounds.
Future: Nothing scheduled as of press time, but the Johnston performance should have earned him another HBO date.

72 WLADIMIR **KLITSCHKO** IBF Heavyweight Titleholder 46-3 (41)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: It's hard to say if he's all the way back, or if we'll ever again be as high on the Ukrainian behemoth as we were back in 2002, but he certainly made major strides over the past year, scoring his two most significant wins in quite a while. First, he showed heart in rising from three knockdowns to outpoint previously unbeaten slugger Sam Peter, and then he demolished veteran Chris Byrd (KO 7) to reclaim an alphabet belt and move to the top of a weak heavyweight division.
Future: Looks like a defense against talented Calvin Brock at Madison Square Garden in November.

73 RODOLFO **LOPEZ** WBC Featherweight Titleholder 19-2-1 (13)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Talk about an unlikely beltholder; he'd never beaten anyone of note, was stopped in four rounds by a sub-.500 fighter in '05, had no business challenging for an alphabet strap … and he scored a brutal seventh-round kayo over Takashi Koshimoto in July at age 22 to claim the title Koshimoto had just snagged from Injin Chi earlier in the year.
Future: It appears Chi will get the first crack, in Korea in November. We'll know after that whether the young Mexican is a fluke or not.

Lopez hammers Koshimoto with a flush right

PHOTO BY JIJI PRESS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

74 JAVIER **CASTILLEJO** WBA Middleweight Titleholder 61-6 (41)

Last Year's Ranking: 87
Status Report: Definitely in the running for Comeback of the Year after losing to Fernando Vargas (L 10) in August '05, appearing to be on his last legs at age 38, and shocking highly regarded Felix Sturm (KO 10) for a 160-pound trinket in July. In between the Vargas low and the Sturm high, Spaniard marked time against hapless losers Presente Brito (W 8) and Luis Carmona (KO 2).
Future: Scheduled for a fight with second-rater Mariano Carrera of Argentina in November.

75 TAKASHI **KOSHIMOTO** Featherweight 39-2-2 (17)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Previously anonymous Japanese veteran scored one of 2006's biggest upsets … and then immediately suffered one of 2006's biggest upsets. With the help of a pivotal point deduction, won a split decision over Injin Chi for the WBC title in January, then suffered a brutal defeat against anonymous Rodolfo Lopez (KO by 7) in his first defense six months later.
Future: Is considering retirement, but we'll see if that changes once he gets over the initial distress of losing his belt in such painful fashion.

Koshimoto lands right during upset of Chi

PHOTO BY JIJI PRESS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

76 INJIN **CHI** Featherweight 30-3-1 (18)

Last Year's Ranking: 38
Status Report: Drops big time after a year in which he fought only once, losing a split decision and his alphabet belt to major underdog Takashi Koshimoto in January. A point deduction for a headbutt that caused a cut to Koshimoto was pivotal, but the truth is, if the Korean had performed at his best, it wouldn't have been close enough for that point to matter.
Future: Getting a November shot at Rodolfo Lopez, who kayoed Koshimoto in July. It will be interesting to see if the 33-year-old Chi has enough to left to upend the 23-year-old titlist.

77 SCOTT **HARRISON** Featherweight 25-2-2 (14)

Last Year's Ranking: 65
Status Report: The good news for the Scottish fighter is that he beat credible opponent Nedal Hussein by unanimous decision in November '05. The bad news is ... everything else. An April incident at a Glasgow pub left him facing assorted charges including assaulting a police officer and just, a couple of weeks later, he was picked up on suspicion of drug possession. Meanwhile, the 29-year-old hasn't fought at all in '06.
Future: A fight with Juan Manuel Marquez is possible, if and when Harrison gets his head together.

Harrison overpowers Hussein

PHOTO JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

78 CELESTINO **CABALLERO** Junior Featherweight 24-2 (17)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Beanpole southpaw from Panama followed up quality win over Daniel Ponce DeLeon with more decent victories over Yober Ortega (W 12) and Roberto Bonilla (KO 7). Somewhat of a mystery man to American fans—he's fought sparingly on U.S. TV—but a very dangerous boxer-puncher just the same.
Future: Will have fought Somsak Sithchatchawal for an alphabet title by the time you read this in a fight that looks highly competitive on paper.

79 GUILLERMO **JONES** Cruiserweight 33-3-2 (26)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Scored a major breakthrough win over former beltholder Wayne Braithwaite (KO 4) in a thriller on Showtime in September '05, vaulting himself to top-contender status in the 200-pound division. Unfortunately, due in part to illnesses, hasn't fought since. The most incredible thing about this 6'4" Panamanian, who towers over nearly everyone in the cruiserweight division: Eight years ago, he was challenging for titles as a 6'4" junior middleweight.
Future: Having missed out on chances to fight Steve Cunningham or O'Neil Bell, now has to play the waiting game while they take other fights.

80 STEVE **CUNNINGHAM** Cruiserweight 19-0 (10)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: All has gone well for Philadelphian in the ring, where he scored a quality win over Kelvin Davis (W 12) and a fairly meaningless win over Lloyd Bryan (KO 5), but he hasn't been able to get anybody in the ring since January, as both champion O'Neil Bell and Guillermo Jones have pulled out of scheduled Showtime-televised fights with him.
Future: Taking his next best option, a bout with top-10 rated Krzysztof Wlodarczyk in Poland in November for a vacant alphabet trinket. If successful there, maybe a *real* title shot will follow.

Cunningham (left) on the attack against Jones

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND

81 JOSE ANTONIO **RIVERA** WBA Super Welterweight Titleholder 38-4-1 (24)

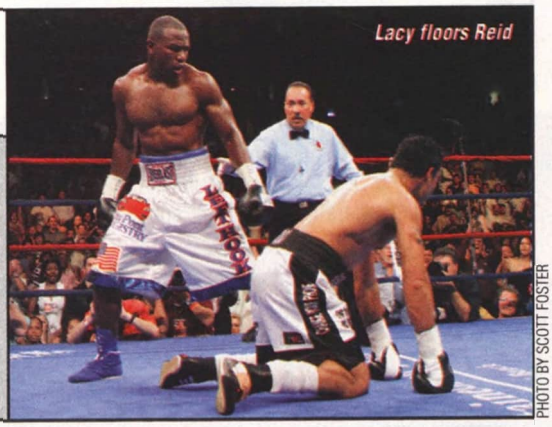
Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Scored best win of an up-and-down 14-year career in May when he tallied five knockdowns (two in the first round, three late in the fight) and overcame one taste of canvas himself to outpoint Alejandro "Terra" Garcia for a vacant 154-pound strap. Has come a fair distance since his days of losing to Robert Frazier and Pat Coleman.
Future: Has been discussed as a possible Cory Spinks opponent at some point. We'd prefer to see a rematch with Luis Collazo, if Collazo is willing to move up from welterweight.

82 OLEG **MASKAEV** WBC Heavyweight Titleholder 33-5 (26)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: You may ask yourself: Is this the same Oleg Maskaev we were all begging to retire a few years ago? Indeed it is the same person, but he's a different fighter now, his confidence restored after four unbeaten years against gradually improving opposition. Dubiously became an alphabet mandatory with win over Sinan Samil Sam (W 12), but made good on the unmerited opportunity by upsetting Hasim Rahman (KO 12) to claim a belt at age 37.
Future: Bruising win over Rahman took a physical toll, meaning he'll be out of action until early-'07. First defense will probably come against Sam Peter.

83 JEFF **LACY** Super Middleweight 21-1 (17) with 1 no-contest

Last Year's Ranking: 52
Status Report: After scoring two of the best wins of his career—an eighth-round kayo of Robin Reid and a two-round blowout over Scott Pemberton—got dismantled by Joe Calzaghe (L 12) in a bout for the vacant RING 168-pound title in March and has been licking his wounds since. Showed heart in lasting the distance, but the 2000 Olympian was made to look terribly one-dimensional.
Future: Probably won't fight again until '07. Considering the punishment he took against Calzaghe, that might not be a bad thing.

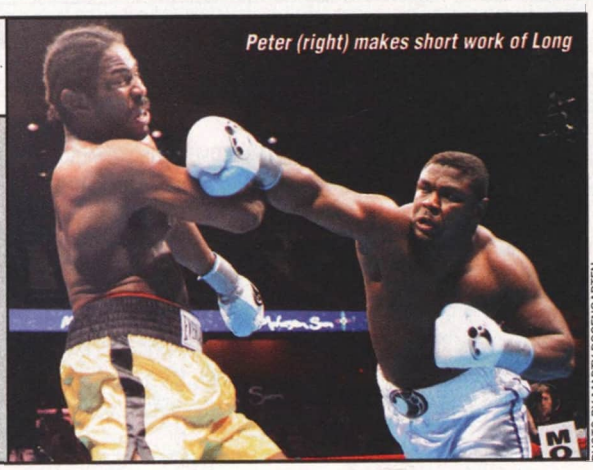

Lacy floors Reid
PHOTO BY SCOTT FOSTER

84 JEAN-MARC **MORMECK** Cruiserweight 32-3 (22)

Last Year's Ranking: 36
Status Report: Was favored to defeat O'Neil Bell, unify all three cruiserweight baubles, and retain his RING championship in January, but he completely ran out of gas in the later rounds and was stopped in 10. Began rebuilding by beating Sebastian Hill (KO 4), a fighter who was on an eight-fight winless streak, which somehow made the Frenchman an alphabet mandatory to Bell.
Future: There's no date set yet, but he should be getting his rematch with Bell soon.

85 SAMUEL **PETER** Heavyweight 27-1 (22)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: A mere prospect as of last summer, the wicked-hitting Nigerian stepped up the competition big time in the past year and showed he can be competitive with anyone in the heavyweight division. Scored three knockdowns but was otherwise outboxed and lost a unanimous decision to Wladimir Klitschko, and 12 months later, powered his way to a close decision over tricky James Toney. In between, scored wins over Robert Hawkins (W 10) and Julius Long (KO 1).
Future: Is Oleg Maskaev's mandatory challenger, and given the Kazakh's past chin issues, many will make "The Nigerian Nightmare" the favorite.


Peter (right) makes short work of Long
PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

86 JAMES **TONEY** Heavyweight 69-5-3 (43)

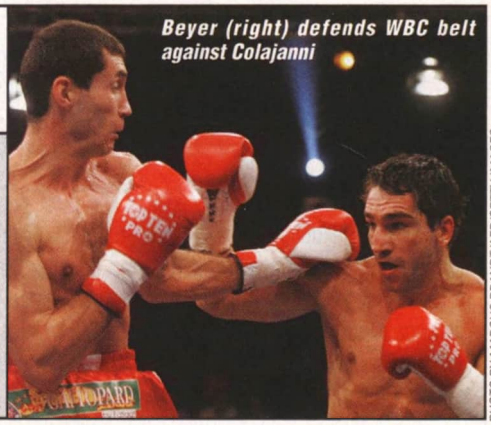
Last Year's Ranking: 31
Status Report: It's time to stop ranking "Lights Out" high on the P-4-P list because he's a "small" heavyweight; he may be a *short* heavyweight, but he's not small at all, having weighed 237 and 233 pounds for his last two fights. And that weight was a serious issue in the ring, as conditioning seemed to separate him from victory against Hasim Rahman (D 12) and Samuel Peter (L 12). Super-skillful three-division former titlist could be the king of the heavyweights if he trained more diligently.
Future: All the missed opportunities have left him on the outside looking in.

87 FELIX **STURM** Middleweight 25-2 (11)

Last Year's Ranking: 59
Status Report: Seemed to be in a groove living off his controversial loss to Oscar De La Hoya and beating up second-raters in Germany, but aging veteran Javier Castillejo stunningly took him out of his groove in July, scoring a 10th-round TKO in a fight Sturm was leading on the scorecards. Prior to that, the German had beaten Maselino Masoe (W 12) in March.
Future: Sharing a card with Castillejo in November, building toward a likely rematch in 2007.

88 MARKUS **BEYER** WBC Super Middleweight Titleholder 34-2-1 (13)

Last Year's Ranking: 88
Status Report: Scored the third, fourth, and fifth defenses of his third WBC title reign, but none were meaningful or spectacular enough to alter the German's "RING 100" ranking. First came faded tough guy Omar Sheika (W 12), then unbeaten but unproven Alberto Colajanni (KO 12), and then little-known Sakio Bika (Tech. Draw 4), which ended when a head clash caused a cut under the titlist's right eye.
Future: Figures to lose October showdown with Denmark's Mikkel Kessler, but if not, you'd better believe Beyer's pound-for-pound ranking will be different next year.

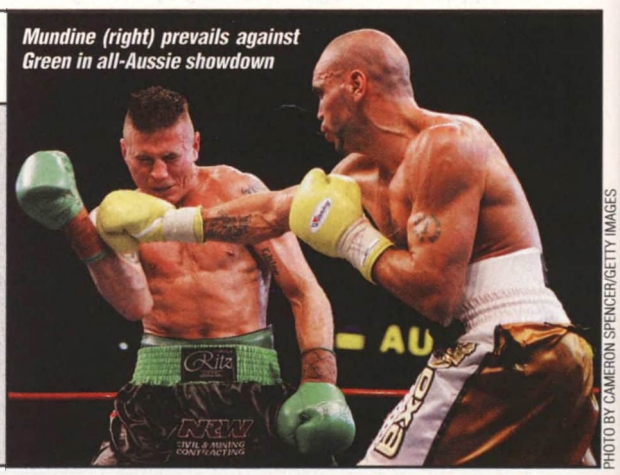

Beyer (right) defends WBC belt against Colajanni
PHOTO BY MARCUS BRANDT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

89 VEERAPOL **SAHAPROM** Bantamweight 53-3-2 (38)

Last Year's Ranking: 44
Status Report: Still keeps a busy schedule at age 37, but otherwise, he ain't what he used to be. The long-reigning beltholder scored tune-up wins against Joel Bauya (W 10), Roger Galicia (KO 4), Rey Llagas (KO 2), and Scari Korori (KO 1), but wasn't tuned up enough, as he got stopped in the ninth round in March by Hozumi Hasegawa, the man who'd taken his title a year earlier. Immediately bounced back with a victory over anonymous Pascal Mhagama (KO 3).
Future: Says he wants another crack at Hasegawa, but considering he's lost to him twice already, we don't see the point.

90 ANTHONY **MUNDINE** Super Middleweight 26-3 (20)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: After keep-busy wins over Rashid Matoumla (KO 6) and Rico Nee (KO 3), won the ultimate Australian grudge match, comfortably outpointing rival Danny Green at Aussie Stadium in May before a crowd of more than 30,000. Superior skill won out over his opponent's heavier hands.
Future: Is a mandatory to Mikkel Kessler (who decisioned him in June '05), but won't get a shot for a while, as the Kessler-Markus Beyer winner apparently owes Beyer's mandatory, Librado Andrade, a shot first. Maybe the Aussie can target Joe Calzaghe in the meantime.


Mundine (right) prevails against Green in all-Aussie showdown
PHOTO BY CAMERON SPENCER/GETTY IMAGES

86 JAMES TONEY

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

91 SAM SOLIMAN
Middleweight 32-8 (13)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: His first loss in four years was perhaps the best performance of his career, as he gave pound-for-pound standout Winky Wright a difficult night last December, bothering him with his activity and losing a clear-cut but competitive decision. Returned with a win over Raul Munoz (KO 6), and was supposed to fight Enrique Ornelas in August, but had to pull out with a back injury.
Future: Whatever happens in Jermain Taylor-Kassim Ouma, we'd love to see Ouma-Soliman next, a CompuBox classic if ever there was one.

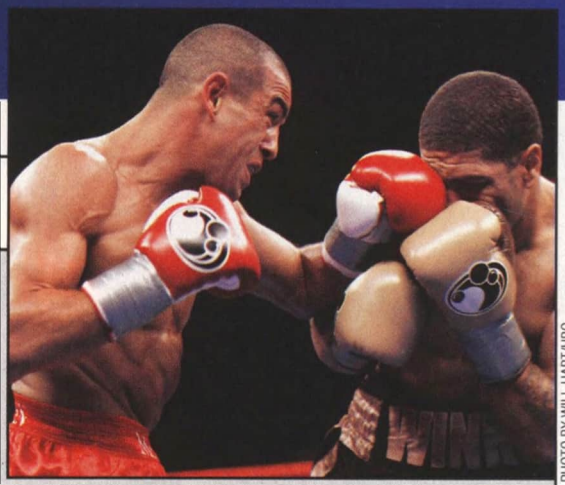


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Soliman enjoys a positive moment against Wright

92 KERMIT CINTRON
Welterweight 26-1 (24)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Some wondered if he could possibly recover from humbling kayo loss to Antonio Margarito, but it appears he has under the tutelage of Hall of Fame trainer Emanuel Steward. After easy win over no-name Francisco Parra (KO 3), found himself in a war with contender David Estrada on ESPN2 and gutted out a 10th-round kayo win that suggested the Pennsylvania-based Puerto Rican was not ruined by the Margarito loss.
Future: Powerpuncher will be favored over Mark Suarez in fight for bogus vacant alphabet strap.

93 OMAR NARVAEZ
Flyweight 22-0-2 (15)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Tiny Argentine added two more WBO title defenses and one non-title win to his dossier, gradually improving his position within the 112-pound division. Title defenses came against previously unbeaten Bernard Inom (KO 11) and Filipino prospect Rexon Flores (W 12), and he also scored an over-the-weight victory over trialhorse Dario Azuaga (KO 6). Was close to signing for a major fight on Showtime against Vic Darchinyan, but ultimately declined.
Future: Scheduled for a December fight in Paris, but no opponent has been named yet.

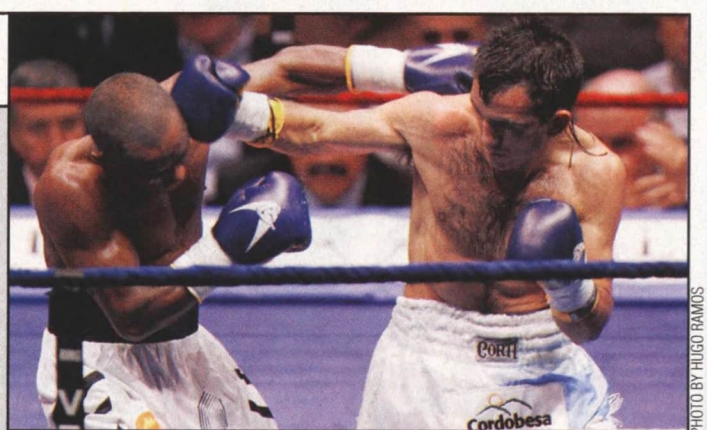


PHOTO BY HUGO RAMOS

Narvaez made two more defenses of WBO strap

94 JOSE NAVARRO
Junior Bantamweight 23-2 (10)

Last Year's Ranking: 72
Status Report: Though his first title shot ended in a highly controversial defeat, the 2000 U.S. Olympian's second shot ended in a clear-cut loss, bumping him toward the bottom of this list. Outpointed unanimously by WBC beltholder Masamori Tokuyama in February, but hit the comeback trail less than three months later with an ESPN-televised win over Vernie Torres (W 10).
Future: Nothing scheduled as of press time, though there was talk of finding room for him on a *Boxing After Dark* telecast.

95 ISAAC HLATSHWAYO
Lightweight 25-0 (9)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Previously known purely for his "where did he come from?" win over Phillip Ndou, South African proved his worth with a few more quality victories, over veterans Cassius Baloyi (W 12), Aldo Rios (W 12), and Nate Campbell (W 12). Then "The Angel" tested his wings at junior welter with an easy eight-rounder against clubfighter Jeremy Yelton.
Future: There's talk of a fight with Vivian Harris at 140 pounds, though the higher weight could prove problematic for a fighter who doesn't even punch very hard at 135.

96 SILENCE **MABUZA** Bantamweight 19-2 (15)

Last Year's Ranking: 95
Status Report: Typically, a guy ranked 95th one year who loses twice during the next 12 months falls out of the top 100. But exceptions are made when both of your losses come against Rafael Marquez. Mabuza lost in four rounds on cuts to the best bantamweight in the world last November, then got stopped in nine in August in their competitive rematch. In between, he scored a solid win over Ricardo "Chapo" Vargas (W 12).
Future: Tender skin was cut in four places in Marquez rematch, so "African Spice" will take a little vacation and heal up before returning to action.

97 SERGEI **LIAKHOVICH** Heavyweight 23-1 (14)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Coming into his April '06 bout against streaking Lamon Brewster, "The White Wolf" was given little chance, but he ran into the right version of Jekyll-and-Hyde Brewster, and he proved much more capable than most observers realized. Belarusian battled back from a seventh-round knockdown to gut out a highly entertaining unanimous decision win to claim the WBO title in his first fight in 16 months.
Future: Slated to face Shannon Briggs on November 4, a fight Liakhovich *should* win, but a dangerous test just the same.

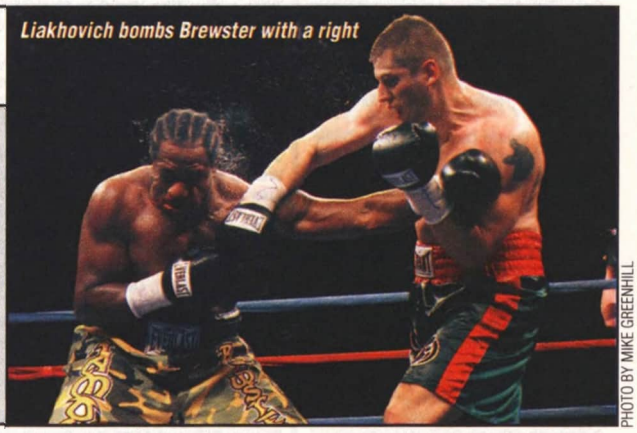

Liakhovich bombs Brewster with a right

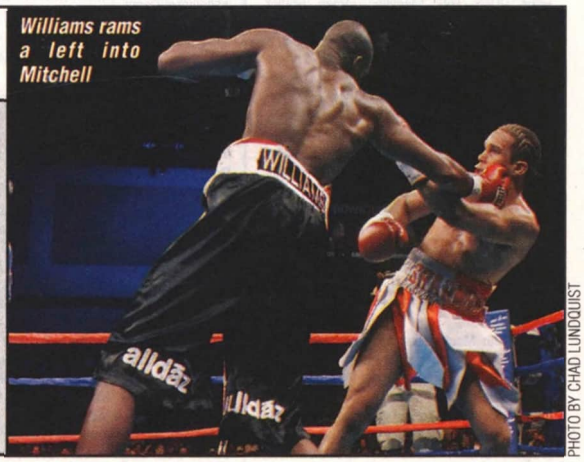
PHOTO BY MIKE GREENHILL

98 RICARDO **MAYORGA** Junior Middleweight 28-6-1 (23) with 1 no-contest

Last Year's Ranking: 37
Status Report: Hard to know just how much "El Matador" has left after a year in which he overpowered Michele Piccirillo (W 12) for a vacant trinket and then got completely dominated by a comebacking Oscar De La Hoya (KO by 6). Yes, he was made to order for "The Golden Boy," but he seems to be getting less and less competitive in his losses, suggesting that maybe, at age 32, the hard living and hard fighting is catching up with the crude powerpuncher.
Future: Nothing set as of press time, and considering he's contemplated retirement before, the Nicaraguan may be thinking about it very seriously now.

99 PAUL **WILLIAMS** Welterweight 31-0 (23)

Last Year's Ranking: not rated
Status Report: Arguably the hottest prospect-cum-contender in the sport, based on a year in which he defeated the likes of Marteze Logan (W 8), Alfonso Sanchez (KO 5), Sergio Rios (KO 2), Walter Matthysse (KO 10), and Sharmba Mitchell (KO 4). A southpaw with a ridiculous welterweight wingspan, he can box well from the outside, but also likes it inside. Based on the shots he took against Mitchell, however, his defense needs some work.
Future: Is a mandatory challenger to Antonio Margarito, and has expressed eagerness to make that fight, but it would probably be wiser to face one or two more lower-ranked contenders first.



Williams rams a left into Mitchell

PHOTO BY CHAD LUNDQUIST

100 DEMARCUS **CORLEY** Junior Welterweight 31-5-1 (17)

Last Year's Ranking: 78
Status Report: Corley closed out a forgettable year by dropping a unanimous 12-round decision to Junior Witter for the vacant WBC belt. Previously, "Chop Chop" was inactive for almost 12 months as he waited around for the alphabet title shot to materialize.
Future: Still on the fringes of world-class 140-pounders, but, at age 32, a steppingstone role awaits.

BACK ISSUES OF KO

Back issues of several editions of *KO Magazine*, the acknowledged leader in boxing journalism, are still available in limited quantity. Since its inception in 1980, *KO* has become known for its quality stories and columns and peak-action photographs. Don't delay. Supplies are running out!

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March 1985: Next For Marvelous Marvin Hagler: The Only Fight That Really Matters. Color Pinup: Mike McCallum. Interview: Thomas Hearns. Also: Santos-Medal, Meza-Garza, Holmes-Bonecrusher.

May 1985: Thomas Hearns: *KO* Fighter Of The Year. Color Pinup: Gerry Cooney. Also: Camacho-Ramirez, Truth Williams, Year In Review.

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Aug. 1985: King Cobra: "Hagler-Hearns Is Done And I'm Better Than Both Of Them!" Color Pinup: John Mugabi. Interview: Bobby Czyz. Also: Larry Holmes, Roberto Duran, DeWitt-Lee.

Oct. 1985: Still Champ After All These Years: Larry Holmes—A Legend Continues To Grow. Interview: Mark Breland. Also: Michael Spinks, Milton McCrory, Wilfredo Gomez.

Nov. 1985: McGuigan! The Pluck Of The Irish. Also: Julio Cesar Chavez, Thomas-Weaver, Donald Curry, featherweights.

Dec. 1985: Pinklon Thomas: "Larry Holmes Betrayed Boxing." Color Pinup: Hagler-Mugabi. Also: Mike McCallum, Tyrell Biggs, Camacho-Ramirez.

Jan. 1986: Macho Mania! Hector Camacho Takes Aim At 10 Tough Targets. Color Pinup: Jimmy Paul. Interview: Alexis Arguello. Also: Truth Williams, Curry-McCrory.

Feb. 1986: King Michael: How Long Will He Rule The Heavyweights? Also: Barry McGuigan, Shawn O'Sullivan, Spinks-Holmes, *Rocky IV*, world's best fighter poll.

Oct. 1986: They're Back!!! The Cooney Circus Returns. Interview: Sugar Ray Leonard. Also: Jimmy Paul, Mike Tyson, Donald Curry.

Dec. 1986: Larry Holmes' Message To Mike Tyson: "Show Me You Can Kick My Butt!" Color pinup: Mark Breland. Interview: Holmes. Also: Witherspoon-Bruno, Evander Holyfield, Cruz-McGuigan, Danny Lopez.

Feb. 1987: Upset Of The Decade: Has Honeyghan Cut Short The Curry Era? Color Pinup: Marvin Johnson. Interview: Bobby Czyz. Also: Edwin Rosario, Hector Camacho.

June 1987: New WBA Welterweight Champion Mark Breland: He's Got A Lot To Smile About. Interview: Marvin Hagler. Color Pinup: Greg Haugen. Also: Michael Olajide, Carlos Monzon.

Oct. 1987: Greatness Beckons: When Will Mike Tyson Answer The Call? Color Pinup: Michael Olajide. Interview: Tyrell Biggs. Also: Paz-Haugen, Marvin Hagler.

Nov. 1987: Michael Spinks: The War With Tyson Is Okay With Him. Color Pinup: Vinny Pazienza. Interview: Frankie Duarte. Also: Matthew Hilton, Hagler-Czyz.

Dec. 1987: Mike Tyson: Undisputed Heavyweight King—But Is He Losing His Loyal Subjects? Color Pinup: Matthew Hilton. Interview: Barry McGuigan. Also: Aaron Pryor, Mike McCallum.

Jan. 1988: The Collapse Of A Hero: Why Breland Never Hit The Mark Of Greatness. Color Pinup: Michael Spinks. Interview: Aaron Pryor. Also: Michael Nunn, Alexis Arguello, lightweights.

Feb. 1988: Pazienza & Haugen Go For Each Other's Throats. Color Pinup: Marlon Starling. Interview: Bob Arum. Also: Tate-Olajide, ESPN Boxing.

July 1988: Superfight History Dictates: Don't Expect The Expected From Tyson-Spinks. Color Pinup: Roger Mayweather. Interview: Dr. Ferdie Pacheco. Also: Roberto Duran, Azumah Nelson, Barkley-Olajide.

Aug. 1988: Tyson-Spinks: *KO's* Fearless Forecast Of Superfight '88. Color Pinup: Buddy McGirt. Interview: Matthew Hilton. Also: Lockridge-Knight, Evander Holyfield, Lloyd Honeyghan.

Sept. 1988: Tyson-Spinks, The Aftermath—What If Tyson Wins; What If Spinks Wins? Color Pinup: Frank Tate. Interview: Marlon Starling. Also: Barry McGuigan, Simon Brown, risk-taking.

Oct. 1988: Middleweight Terrorism: Iran Bombs The Hit Man. Color Pinup: Don Lalonde. Interview: Frank Bruno. Also: Roger Mayweather, Marvin Hagler.

Dec. 1988: Sugar Ray's Comeback: Why? Color Pinup: Simon Brown. Interview: Kevin Rooney. Also: Michael Nunn, best fighter poll, welterweight wars.

Jan. 1989: The Troubled Times Of Mike Tyson. Color Pinup: Lloyd Honeyghan. Interview: Gil Clancy. Also: Meldrick Taylor, Jeff Fenech, Boxing's Champs.

Aug. 1989: Special 100th Issue. Color Pinup: Hagler vs. Hearns. Also: The *KO* Years, 50 most influential people, '80s ratings, best of *KO* Interview, year-by-year review, Sugar Ray Robinson.

Sept. 1989: "I Beat Up Tyson Before, I'll Do It Again," by Carl Williams. Color Pinup: Michael Nunn. Also: Chavez-Mayweather, Brian Mitchell, Marv Albert.

Feb. 1990: George Foreman Risks A Multimillion-Dollar Shot At Tyson. Color Pinup: Brian Mitchell. Interview: Riddick Bowe. Also: Simon Brown, Molina-Lopez, East vs. West.

June 1990: A Sugar-Free Future? Thomas Hearns Is Looking Up. Color Pinup: Glenn McCrory. Interview: Michael Moorer. Also: Matthew Hilton, Molina-Suarez, Foreman-Cooney, Camacho-Paz.

July 1990: *KO* Interview—Sugar Ray Leonard. Color Pinup: Jorge Paez. Also: Michael Nunn, Buster Douglas, Jibaro Perez, the Olympians.

Aug. 1990: Meldrick Taylor: Brilliance In Defeat. Color Pinup: Buster Douglas. Interview: Teddy Atlas. Also: Buddy McGirt, Dokes-Ruddock, Simon Brown.

Sept. 1990: *KO* Interview—Buster Douglas. Color Pinup: Macho Camacho. Also: Thomas Hearns, Nigel Benn, Greg Haugen, Boxing Hall of Fame.

Oct. 1990: Send In The Clown: Is Jorge Paez A Phenom Or A Fraud? Color Pinup: Paul Banke. Interview: Tony Lopez. Also: Chavez-Taylor II, Jesse Benavides.

Nov. 1990: The Comeback Of Mike Tyson: A Crooked Course Straight To The Top. Color Pinup: Tony Lopez. Interview: Don Dunphy. Also: Davis-Breland, Riddick Bowe, federal commission.

Dec. 1990: The Heart Of The Matter: Who Will Survive The Holyfield-Douglas War? Color Pinup: Terry Norris. Interview: Virgil Hill. Also: Michael Carbajal, Ruelas Brothers, best fighter poll.

Jan. 1991: Macho Ado About Nothing? Why Hector Camacho Wants To Be Believed. Color Pinup: Meldrick Taylor. Interview: Irving Rudd. Also: Sugar Ray Leonard, Orlando Canizales, Vinny Pazienza.

Feb. 1991: 10 Fighters To Fear: Boxing's Most Destructive Hitters. Color Pinup: Razor Ruddock. Interview: Ray Mercer. Also: Roberto Duran, Saoul Mamby, Mills Lane, Sugar Ray Robinson.

May 1991: Ruddock Eyes The Big Upset Of Tyson. Color Pinup: Luisito Espinosa. Interview: Jeff Fenech. Also: Virgil Hill, Pernell Whitaker, Alex Ramos, Simon Brown, Buddy McGirt.

June 1991: Exclusive *KO* Interview: Evander Holyfield. Color Pinup: Raul Perez. Also: Norris-Leonard, Charles Williams, champs of 1971 vs. 1991, J.C. Chavez.

July 1991: Riddick Bowe: Is He Destined To Be Heavyweight Champ? Color Pinup: Michael Carbajal. Interview: Buddy McGirt. Also: Bobby Czyz, Buster Douglas, Mark Breland.

Aug. 1991: Desert Storm II: Will The Tyson-Ruddock Rematch Be Different? Color Pinup: Loreto Garza. Interview: Michael Carbajal. Also: Brown-Blocker, Fenech-Nelson preview, Harold Brazier, Yuh-Carbajal.

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Oct. 1991: Thomas Hearns Works Another Miracle! Now There Are More Hills Left To Climb. Color Pinup: Humberto Gonzalez. Interview: Mike McCallum. Also: Norris-Curry, Richard Steele, Troy Dorsey.

Dec. 1991: Tyson vs. Holyfield—The Experts Analyze The Elements That Will Decide The Fight. Color Pinup: Joey Gamache. Also: Michael Moorer, Pernell Whitaker, Greg Richardson, Robert Quiroga.

Jan. 1992: The Tyson-Holyfield Showdown: An Exclusive Forecast By George Foreman. Color Pinup: Myung Woo Yuh. Also: Fenech-Nelson, TV announcers, boxing's toughest men, Toney-McCallum.

March 1992: *KO* Interview Mike Tyson: An In-Depth, Toe-To-Toe Talk With Boxing's Biggest Star. Color Pinup: Michael Moorer. Also: Thomas Hearns, Tracy Patterson, Larry Holmes, best fighter poll.

May 1992: Division-By-Division Faceoffs: The Best Of '92 vs. The Best Of '67. Color Pinup: James Warring. Interview: Hector Camacho. Also: Tommy Morrison, Bert Cooper, Gianfranco Rosi.

June 1992: If Not Tyson Or Holyfield, Then Who? Bowe? Moorer? Ruddock? Lewis? Mercer? Color Pinup: James Toney. Interview: Shelly Finkel. Also: Scotty Olson, overrated and underrated fighters, Orlin Norris, Whitaker-Pineda.

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Nov. 1992: Foreman vs. Holmes: The Fight Evander Holyfield Should Have Prevented. Color Pinup: Iran Barkley. Interview: Joey Gamache. Also: Hector Camacho, Tracy Patterson, Rudy Zavala.

Dec. 1992: The Final Four: Ruddock vs. Lewis, Holyfield vs. Bowe. Color Pinup: Genaro Hernandez. Interview: Lennox Lewis. Also: Whitaker-Pineda, Bowe-Coetzer, Alex Stewart, Gamache-Lopez.

Jan. 1993: Holyfield vs. Bowe: Who Will Win And Why. Color Pinup: Al Cole. Interview: Vinny Pazienza. Also: James Toney, Terrence Alli, Maurice Blocker.

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Dec. 1993: The *KO* Feud Rages On: "I Will Torture You!" Says Riddick Bowe To Lennox Lewis. Color Pinup: Kennedy McKinney. Also: Mississippi boxing, George Foreman, Yori Boy Campas , Carbajal-Kim, Morrison-Moorer.

June 1995: The Tug-Of-War Over Mike Tyson. Color Pinup: Wilfredo Vasquez. Interview: Oliver McCall. Also: Alejandro Gonzalez, Alexis Arguello, Kostya Tszyu.

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Feb. 1998: Is Lennox Lewis The World's Best Heavyweight? Color Pinup: Charles Brewer. Interview: Marc Ratner. Also: Otis Grant, Arturo Gatti.

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Deal, Lewis Is No Big Deal. Color Pinup: Lou Del Valle. Interview: Lennox Lewis. Also: David Izon, Meldrick Taylor, rapid weight loss.

May 1998: Living Up To The Hype: Sometimes They Do ... Sometimes They Don't. Color Pinup: David Reid. Interview: Best Of ... (Part III). Also: Naseem Hamed, Marty Denkin, women's boxing.

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Aug. 1998: Lewis Bombs Out Briggs: Would The WBC Champ Do This To Holyfield? Color Pinup: Keith Mullings. Interview: Shane Mosley. Also: Pernell Whitaker, Marco Antonio Barrera, Roberto Garcia.

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Oct. 1998: The Ultimate Fantasy Card. Color Pinup: Oscar De La Hoya. Interview: Roy Jones. Also: Brendan Ingle, NYPD boxing, prospect blueprint.

Nov. 1998 The *KO* 100. Color Pinup: Reggie Johnson. Interview: Tim Austin. Also: Cesar Bazan, Spencer Oliver, Bobby Czyz.

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May 2000: Michael Grant vs. Lennox Lewis—25 Insiders Pick The Winner. Color Pinup: Paul Spadafora. Interview: Dan Goossen. Also: Floyd Mayweather, Johnny Tapia, southpaws.

June 2000: Lewis vs. Grant: Who Will Win ... And Why. Color Pinup: Vitali Klitschko. Interview: Sharmba Mitchell. Also: Shane Mosley, David Izon, 2000 Hall of Fame.

July 2000: Today's Fighters, Tomorrow's Hall Of Famers. Color Pinup: Keith Holmes. Interview: Shane Mosley. Also: Zab Judah, Morales-Barrera, Wayne Braithwaite.

Aug. 2000: Mosley Prepares For Oscar: "It Will Be Like The First Round Of Hagler-Hearns." Color Pinup: Steve Johnston. Interview: Chris Byrd. Also: Vargas-Quartey, Thomas Hearns, Felix Trinidad, common sense vs. cowardice.

Sept. 2000: Now Vargas Is Ready For Trinidad & De La Hoya. Color Pinup: Erik Morales. Interview: Chris Byrd. Also: Trinidad vs. all-time greats, Thomas Hearns, common sense vs. cowardice.

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[FULL-COLOR BEGINNING FEBRUARY 2001]

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Volume I, 2006 (KO Presents Boxing 2006): Middleweight Champ Jermain Taylor—Is The Best Yet To Come? Also: Ricky Hatton, Mosley-Vargas preview, Floyd Mayweather, Juan Manuel & Rafael Marquez, Joan Guzman, Steve Cunningham, Liston & Louis, 20 greatest Mexicans.

Volume 2, 2006 (KO Presents Boxing 2006): Pay-Per-View Showdown! Also: Cotto-Malignaggi preview, Hopkins vs. Tarver preview, Rahman-Toney, Jhonny Gonzalez, John Duddy, Castillo-Corrales III preview, Peter Manfredo, Jeff Lacy, Arthur Abraham, 20 greatest Brits.

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❑ AUG/84	❑ JAN/89	❑ OCT/92	❑ MAY/99	❑ APR/02
❑ OCT/84	❑ AUG/89	❑ NOV/92	❑ JUN/99	❑ JUN/02
❑ NOV/84	❑ SEP/89	❑ DEC/92	❑ JUL/99	❑ AUG/02
❑ FEB/85	❑ FEB/90	❑ JAN/93	❑ AUG/99	❑ OCT/02
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❑ MAY/85	❑ JUL/90	❑ MAR/93	❑ OCT/99	❑ WIN/02
❑ JUL/85	❑ AUG/90	❑ MAY/93	❑ NOV/99	❑ MAR/03
❑ AUG/85	❑ SEP/90	❑ JUN/95	❑ DEC/99	❑ MAY/03
❑ OCT/85	❑ OCT/90	❑ SEP/96	❑ HOL/99	❑ JUL/03
❑ NOV/85	❑ NOV/90	❑ NOV/96	❑ JAN/00	❑ SEP/03
❑ DEC/85	❑ DEC/90	❑ DEC/96	❑ FEB/00	❑ NOV/03
❑ JAN/86	❑ JAN/91	❑ JAN/97	❑ MAR/00	❑ WIN/03
❑ FEB/86	❑ FEB/91	❑ AUG/97	❑ MAY/00	❑ FEB/04
❑ OCT/86	❑ MAY/91	❑ HOL/97	❑ JUN/00	❑ APR/04
❑ DEC/86	❑ JUN/91	❑ JAN/98	❑ JUL/00	❑ JUN/04
❑ FEB/87	❑ JUL/91	❑ FEB/98	❑ AUG/00	❑ OCT/04
❑ JUN/87	❑ AUG/91	❑ MAR/98	❑ SEP/00	❑ FEB/05
❑ OCT/87	❑ SEP/91	❑ MAY/98	❑ OCT/00	❑ JUN/05
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❑ FEB/88	❑ MAR/92	❑ NOV/98	❑ APR/01	❑ VOL 2/06
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IS KLITSCHKO TOO MUCH, TOO SOON FOR BROCK?

"In Today's Heavyweight Division, Everybody Is Ready For Everybody"

By William Dettloff
PHOTOS BY WILL HART/HBO

The way it went down, you'd have thought they were appointing a new Pope or Supreme Court Justice. Putting together prizefights probably isn't supposed to be as protracted as all that, but we've made this

Can the undefeated but relatively untested Brock do to Klitschko (above) what he did to Zuri Lawrence (below)? That's the big question going into their November 11 showdown at Madison Square Garden on HBO.

PHOTO BY ALEXANDER HASSENSTEIN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

a business, and anytime you do that, you're bound to make things more complicated than they have to be.

You remember how fights used to get made. A kid went up to another kid on the playground or the ball field and said, "That kid says he can take you." The second kid says, "Oh yeah?" and off we went. A bloody nose or punctured eardrum later, it was all over and our fix was satisfied. For a while.

The making of the Wladimir Klitschko-Calvin Brock fight, which is scheduled for November 11 in New York's Madison Square Garden, was just slightly more involved. It only required several months and all manner of posturing, bluffing, and winking, as well as the falling out of two potential players in Oleg Maskaev and Shannon Briggs. Other than that, things fell into place quite nicely and here we are.

The 31-year-old Brock was not the first choice to face Klitschko, who would have preferred to fight WBC beltholder Oleg Maskaev. But "The Boxing Banker" eventually secured the match anyway, even though many observers think he's being rushed.

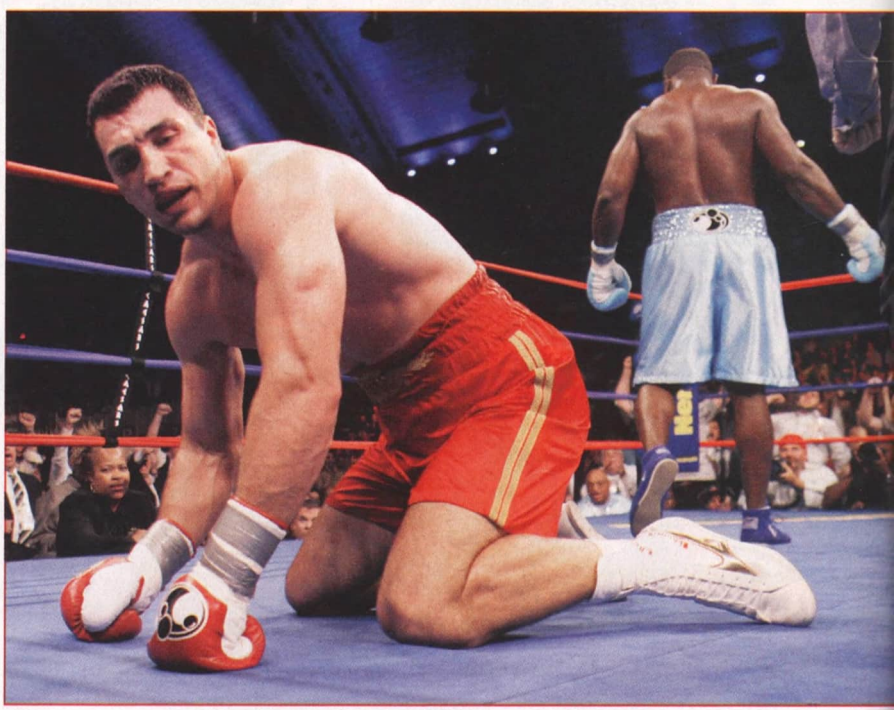
Really, the participation of Brock and his promoter, Main Events, was negligible until the very end. All along it was the unstated aim of Shelly Finkel, Klitschko's co-manager, to get Maskaev, if Maskaev outlasted Hasim Rahman again. He did. That made it hard for Finkel to give the nod to Briggs, who, for all his flaws, can punch, and whom he'd been stringing along like he was a brainy fat chick and final exams were coming up.

Briggs may have unwittingly struck a blow against the exploitation of brainy fat chicks everywhere when he finally said to hell with it and signed to meet Sergei Liakhovich for another alphabet strap. That he had to sell a bit of his soul to Don King to get the fight should matter little. After all, the list is long of heavyweights who have signed with King and later been completely happy with the result—right?

At any rate, Maskaev and his people—none of whom are medical doctors, one can be assured—decided he wouldn't be sufficiently recovered from his myriad aches and owies in time to fight Klitschko in November. (But he *would* be ready a month later to tangle with the decidedly less imposing Peter Okhello in Russia, the intent being to keep Maskaev conscious, more or less, until a very large payday or two could be secured.)

All of which brings us to Brock, seemingly a third choice, or at the least a second, but in this business there's no disgrace in that. This isn't the prom or a job promotion. You take the chances when you get them and you don't count yourself insulted when the doors open for you, even if you're not the first choice. Sometimes second or third choices can get lucky. Ask Kid Rock.

That said, it shouldn't be discounted that Finkel wrangled this well. In Brock, his client is now facing someone who is ranked higher than Briggs, is more respected by some important people in the business (see HBO), and yet, may



Some experts think that Klitschko's chin will let him down, and point to the frequent trips to the canvas he made in his bout with Samuel Peter (above). But it should not be forgotten that Wladimir kept getting up and stormed back to hurt "The Nigerian Nightmare" with a left hook (opposite page) and win a close decision.

not be as dangerous, at least for the first couple of rounds.

Brock is by far a better mechanic than Briggs is and a sturdier pro who doesn't require the presence of an oxygen tank in his corner in the event the fight goes past four rounds. On the other hand, he doesn't possess Briggs' explosiveness or punching power (despite his spectacular kayo of Zuri Lawrence). The ability to handle that kind of power, we all should know by now, is Klitschko's Achilles chin.

Still, not everyone agrees Briggs would have been the more dangerous pick. Veteran trainer Tommy Brooks, who worked with Klitschko some years ago and with Brock right before Brock turned pro, thinks Briggs would have been blown out quickly. "He's an older guy now who's been around a long time and is looking to make a living and get paid, like all of us," Brooks said. "I'm not saying he wouldn't fight hard, because I'm sure he would have. It's just that he's not a mover at all. He'd be right in front of Wladimir, there to be hit, and that's not where you want to be."

Brooks sees Brock doing only marginally better. "Klitschko should win by knockout," he told THE RING. "He's too big and too strong for Calvin. He can really punch. Calvin's going to be using his wheels a lot and he'll have to. Klitschko can crack with both hands, let me tell you."

It is true Brock is more mobile than Briggs, but the ring is a small place when you're overmatched, as Brooks and most others feel Brock is. That begs the question: Is he being rushed? Remember that the biggest name he has beaten is Jameel McCline, who had him down briefly and stayed reasonably tight with him over a brisk 10-rounder. Other than that? A completely shot Clifford Etienne. You could make the argument that it might be too early for Brock, that he might do better to face another top-10 guy or two before getting in there with Klitschko. Is he really ready?

"In today's heavyweight division, everybody is ready for everybody," said veteran matchmaker and promoter Don Elbaum. "It's the worst I've ever seen. Klitschko is the best one that's out there, but if you get a shot, you have to take it. You've got to take the chance. You never know. If Brock hits him on the chin, it could be all over. Then they could come back with a rematch, they could fight two or three times."

Just that possibility—that Brock could land a bomb—makes the fight interesting, even though the odds clearly favor Klitschko. That's really the question here: How will Klitschko react when Brock hits him? We know pretty much how things will go in the reverse. If Klitschko can nail Brock, it will be a short fight. And that's not a shot at Brock.

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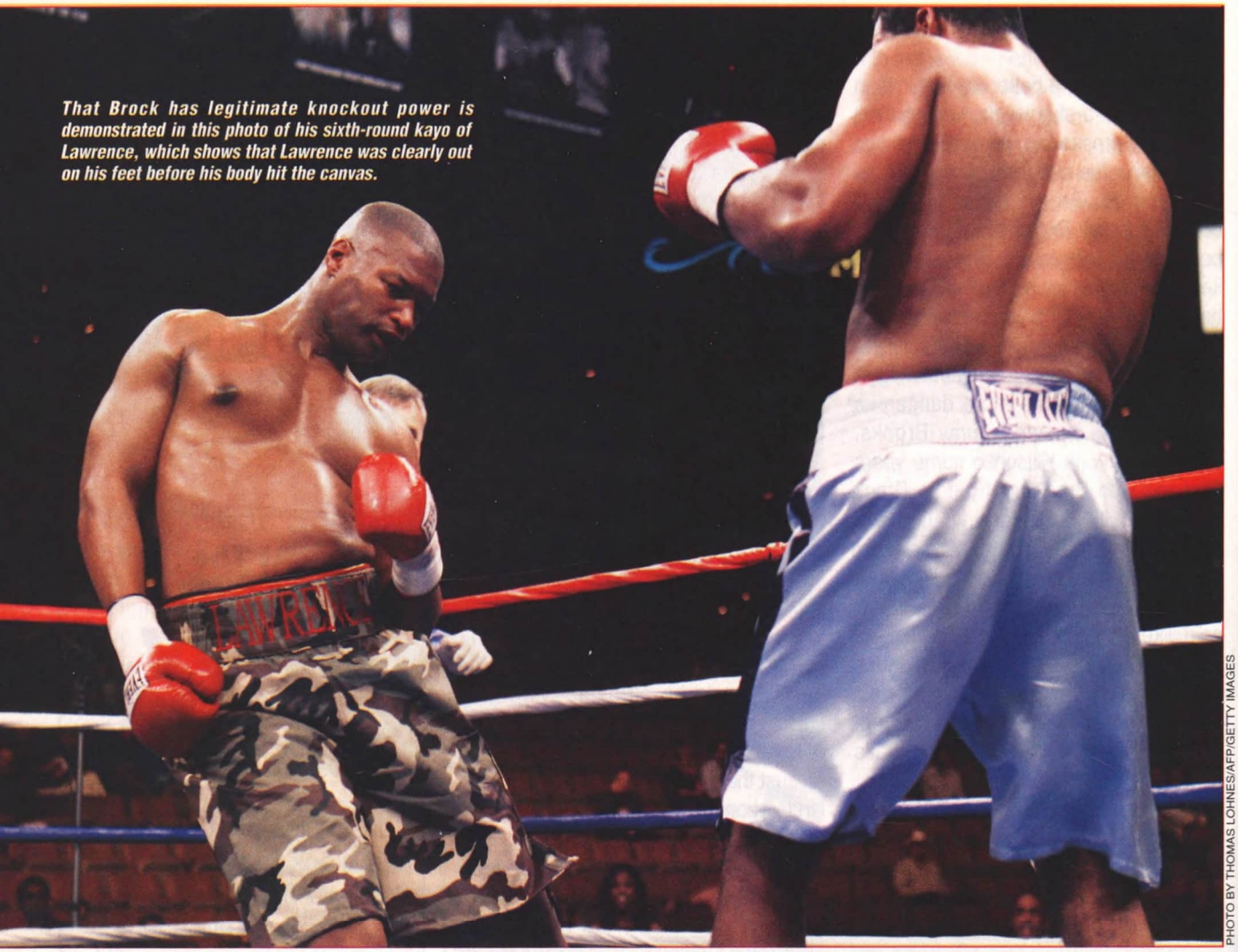


That Brock has legitimate knockout power is demonstrated in this photo of his sixth-round kayo of Lawrence, which shows that Lawrence was clearly out on his feet before his body hit the canvas.

PHOTO BY THOMAS LOHNES/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

There are few heavyweights out there who can take the kind of punishment a fully engaged Klitschko can unleash. He even floored the anvil-chinned Lamon Brewster before hitting the wall and imploding (or until the poisons kicked in, whichever you prefer). For all the disastrous moments he's had, he's had far more good ones, all due to his punch. And, to most observers, that offense and power is all that will matter against Brock.

"Sure, he'll knock Brock out," said Elbaum. "He's the best big guy out there. But that's not saying much."

Even if you think Klitschko is a china-chinned front-runner, if Brock allows himself to be picked off from the outside, say, the way Eliseo Castillo did when he met Klitschko last April, it doesn't go five rounds. That's a given. What's not known is how Klitschko will react if Brock can tag him with a few right hands of his own.

It was just two fights ago that Klitschko shuddered and spun to the canvas about every time Samuel Peter touched him. We haven't seen a heavyweight that terrified since Klitschko himself frightened McCline into submission back in 2002 B.C. (Before Corrie). Of course, Brock isn't the puncher Peter is, or the puncher that Sanders was when he obliterated Klitschko in two rounds and ruined the fun for everybody. But maybe he doesn't have to be.

Almost everyone but Klitschko himself believes that the Sanders fight and then the debacle against Brewster squashed any confidence he had built up over the years. If you want proof, go back and watch tape of his tentative, halting performance against DaVarryl Williamscn. It was nothing like the dominant performances we saw as he moved up the ladder against guys like Monte Barrett (KO 2) and Francois Botha (KO 8), or in his first win over Chris Byrd (W 12).

Indeed, it might be the perfect time for Brock to go after Klitschko. It clearly appeared to be anxiety that had him flopping all over the ring every time Peter breathed on him. He was able to relax against Byrd in their rematch for the same reasons that Andrew Golota did when he fought Byrd almost to a standstill: He didn't fear his punch. But put Klitschko in with someone who can hurt him and he might freeze up again.

"It's mental with him, because physically he's the same guy he was five years ago," said manager Steve Munisteri. "I've had a number of guys sparring with Klitschko—Rafael Butler, Malcolm Tann, Travis Walker—and they tell me that in the gym, Wladimir is the same guy he was when he was at his peak. These guys used to spar with Vitali also and they could stay with him and sometimes even get the better of him. That's not the case with Wladimir. He's a big, strong guy, who's fast and hits hard

and knows how to fight. Compared to Brock, he's on a whole other level."

That's further evidence in support of the theory that Klitschko retains serious doubts about himself when he's out there under the big lights. It may be true, as Emanuel Steward has suggested, that Klitschko proved his mettle and self-belief when he survived the scariest moments against Peter and even hurt him badly in the last round. One could counter that he didn't go after Peter at that moment because of those very same doubts.

Brooks believes that when we see Klitschko having difficulty, it's not only because of the self-doubt that appears to exist now, but also because he's caught between styles. "You all need to remember that he's still transitioning from a European to American style," Brooks said. "Of course he lost some confidence, but it's the style issue too. But he'll beat Brock, especially if he uses that jab, like he's supposed to. And I think he will, because Emanuel always emphasizes the jab."

PHOTO BY THOMAS LOHNES/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

David Bostice, pictured on the attack against Luan Krasniqi, has fought both Brock and Klitschko, and believes the match is a tossup that will hinge on whether or not Brock stays out of Klischko's power alley.

Journeyman heavyweight David Bostice, one of two common opponents Klitschko and Brock share (McCline is the other) doesn't necessarily agree, even if the evidence does. Klitschko destroyed him in two rounds in 2000, while he managed to give Brock a pretty good workout over 12 rounds just last year. To him, it's almost a pick-'em fight that will be determined by which guy executes better.

"It's a great fight. If Calvin Brock fights his fight and stays busy, he can win," said Bostice. "He has to fight the right type of fight. He can't stay in front of him. Brock's greatest strengths are he's determined and he stays busy. That's good for a heavyweight because most of them don't stay busy. He just can't stand in front of Wladimir. If he doesn't, he'll do great.

"Klitschko doesn't have great one-punch power, but if he hits you a lot he can hurt you pretty bad," Bostice continued. "If Calvin can box and move and get inside Klitschko's mind, he'll win. If Klitschko keeps him at range and can hit him, Klitschko will win."

Here's the problem with that theory and Brock's great problem overall: No one has beaten Klitschko by outboxing him. That's what most guys try to do. The guys who beat him—Ross Purrity, Sanders, and Brewster—did it by taking his heavy artillery and outlasting him (Purrity and Brewster) or going right to him and outslugging him (Sanders).

While Brock certainly hasn't demonstrated that he has a glass chin, neither has he shown a great capacity for taking shots from a big puncher. Maybe he can. We don't know. Nor has he shown the kind of power and strength he needs to walk to Klitschko and engage in a shootout.

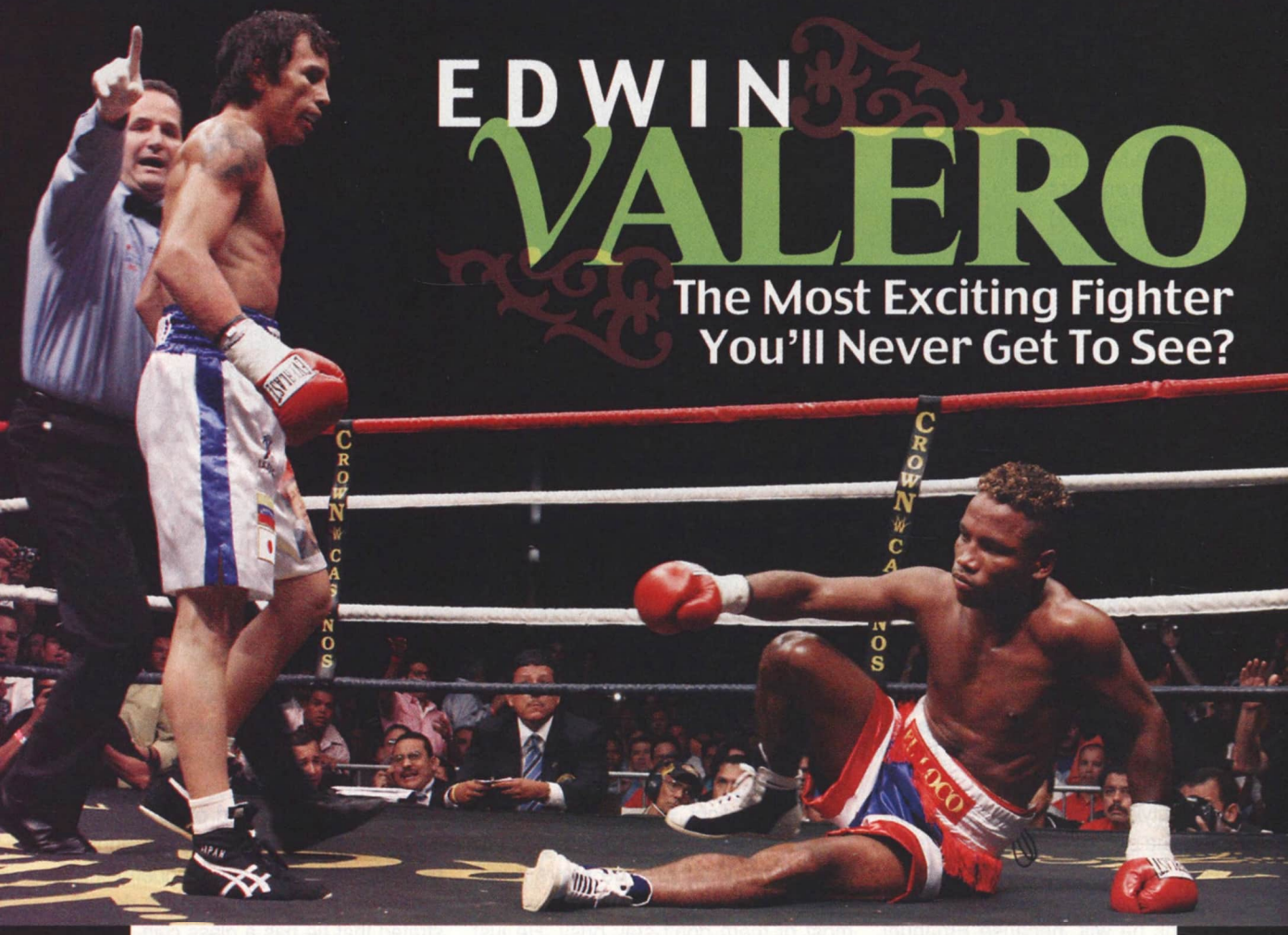
Brock could get lucky and land a punch that knocks Klitschko stiff or undermines his confidence so much that the big guy folds. It's more likely that by the end, Brock, a good technical fighter but a bit over his head here, will be wishing he'd been the one strung along. Sometimes it's better to be the brainy fat chick. ■

KAYO ARTIST

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT

EDWIN VALERO

The Most Exciting Fighter You'll Never Get To See?



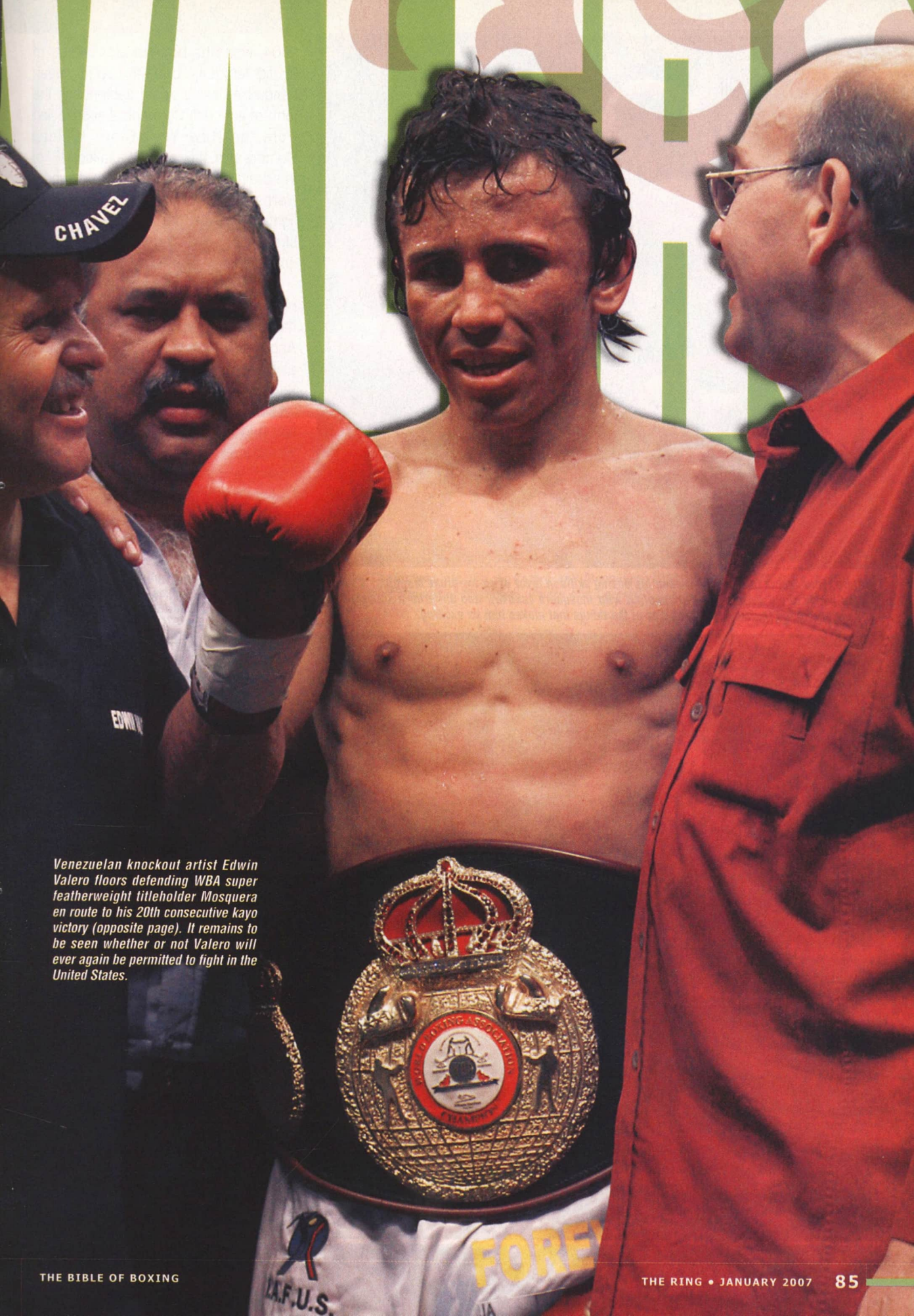
By Don Stewart
PHOTOS BY SUMIO YAMADA

Sixty-four years ago, a farmer in Central Mexico discovered a small, hot pimple of earth rising in his cornfield. Fearing for his crops, the farmer hurled dirt on the small cinder cone in an effort to stop its growth, but the pimple gradually grew into a volcanic mountain that buried the nearby village in lava.

The lava flow pushed its way through the town's cathedral, reaching the sanctuary where it stopped, some would say miraculously, at the foot of the altar. That altar had been the home of a crucifix that was believed to be an antenna for miracles, so much so that it made the now-wrecked cathedral a pilgrimage destination. The crucifix was rescued before the lava arrived and taken to a nearby church in Nuevo San José, where it has continued attracting miracle-seekers.

One of those pilgrims is Los Angeles-based trainer Joe Hernandez, who is convinced of the relic's divine power. He first visited the church in 1980 while racked by financial anxiety. Hernandez said those burdens began to lift shortly after that initial trip, and he's returned to Nuevo San José at least once a year ever since.

His most memorable visit came in February of



Venezuelan knockout artist Edwin Valero floors defending WBA super featherweight titleholder Mosquera en route to his 20th consecutive kayo victory (opposite page). It remains to be seen whether or not Valero will ever again be permitted to fight in the United States.

Valero, who seems to have abandoned his boxing skills in favor of go-for-broke slugging, also took some heavy shots during his wild shootout with Mosquera (above), and suffered a knockdown in the second round (below). But that's one of the things that makes him so exciting.

2004, when he brought along three of his fighters. One of them had just been handed a boxing death sentence in the form of an indefinite medical suspension from the New York State Athletic Commission, the result of a failed MRI of the brain. "He was really on a downer," Hernandez said of Venezuelan junior lightweight phenom Edwin Valero. "It's like telling someone: 'Listen, you're gonna die.' We had to try something."

So there was Valero, posing for a photo that was then laid at the base of the relic. Before they left to return to Los Angeles, the church's priest told Valero and Hernandez that not only would he fight again, but also that one day he would be a world champion. "Did it give him a lot of confidence and hope?" said Hernandez. "There was nothing but confidence and hope."

Like the Parícutin volcano, nothing has been able to stop the rise of Valero, 20-0, (20). Forced to take his act on the road, he put together a record-setting string of first-round knockouts before breaking through in August with a 10th-round stoppage of WBA beltholder Vicente Mosquera in Mosquera's native Panama.

"I've never seen anyone punch like this guy," said RING correspondent Brent Matteo Alderson, the only American on press row for Valero-Mosquera. "He's going to be one of the Latin-American greats."

Thanks to the New York suspension, which stemmed from a head injury incurred in a 2001 motorcycle accident, Valero is boxing's Cuban cigar—illegal in the United States, but widely circulated underground. Hard-core fight junkies, the type who pour over Internet message boards and order Roy Jones-Prince Badi Ajamu on pay-per-view, have developed an obsessive following for the 24-year-old southpaw.

They flock to sites such as YouTube.com, where clips of Valero sparring in Los Angeles are included with some of his pro bouts, including the Mosquera slugfest. Their ring-

The atmosphere inside Panama City's Figali Convention Center was electric as Valero and Mosquera traded heavy blows. The local fans were so passionate in their support of Mosquera, Valero hired armed guards to protect him during his ring walk.

leader has been Maxboxing.com editor Doug Fischer, who became an admitted fan of Valero's after watching him dominate sparring sessions three years ago in Los Angeles.

Fischer began referring to "El Inca" as his son after readers ripped him for writing that Valero would knock out superstar Erik Morales. "I got attacked," Fischer said. "I was expecting it. But everybody who disagreed with my opinion referred to Valero as 'my boy.'" And so it came to pass that Valero was "adopted" by an American sportswriter.

If ever given the right medium, Valero could find himself quickly embraced by mainstream U.S. fans as well. Nothing sells in this sport like power, and there's plenty of it in those little hands. THE RING's number-six rated 130-pounder stopped his first 18 opponents in less than a round, breaking the record of 15 set by lightweight Young Otto in *1905*. The list of victims is hardly a who's who list, but it does include Whyber Garcia (17-3 at the time), Roque Cassiani (21-13-2), Esteban de Jesus Morales (24-8-1), and Alejandro Heredia (7-0-1).

Fischer believes Valero also possesses crossover appeal due to his intelligence and individuality. For example, after stopping Mosquera, Valero received a congratulatory phone call from Hugo Chavez, the Venezuelan president whom the fighter publicly supports. During his time in California, Valero often frustrated Hernandez by wearing black trench coats and greasing up his long hair to attend fight cards.

"He could be a crossover star," Fischer said. "He's very opinionated. He does have political and social awareness. He's a little off the beaten path. He's kind of alternative. He's his own person. He dresses the way he wants to dress and says what he wants to say."

Valero had to endure a wild pro-Mosquera crowd in Panama City that was riled up further by the challenger's negative prefight comments toward their hero. Still, Valero nearly scored his 19th first-round stoppage as he floored "El Loco" twice in a give-and-take opening round, both times with punishing lefts. "It was intense," Alderson said. "Mosquera came out moving forward behind his right hand. Valero was just bombing on him."

But Mosquera, 24-2-1 (12), unbeaten since dropping a split decision to Armando Cordoba in April of 2000, began outlanding Valero in the second. He kept coming forward behind a high guard, landing his right hand almost at will against his offensive-minded challenger.

Having reached the third round for the first time in his career, Valero looked tired. Mosquera dropped him midway through with a flurry, and the frenzied crowd flung trash into the ring. Valero, who rose quickly, was given a few seconds of extra rest while the garbage was cleared. He began fighting at a more even pace from that point, while Mosquera continued to charge forward behind chants of "Loco! Loco!" from his countrymen.

Going into the fight, Valero grew so worried about his safety that he hired armed guards to walk him to the ring. "It was awesome," Alderson said of the atmosphere. "They had the drums going. There were shouts of 'Panama!' all around."

Already regaining control, Valero took over in the fifth after a Mosquera low blow gave him some more extra rest time. By the eighth, the fight was completely one-sided with Valero dominating from the outside. Mosquera's corner finally rescued their man from further damage with a minute to go in the 10th.

ESPNdeportes.com reported that the two fighters bumped into each other while Valero and his wife, Carolina, were on their way back to their hotel. The new beltholder told Mosquera that everything he said before the fight was just to sell tickets and that the Panamanian had earned his respect that night in the ring.

"In some ways, he kind of reminds me of Acelino Freitas," Fischer said. "He likes to be around people. When you talk to him, you find it hard to believe he knocks people out for a living."

Valero promoter Akihiko Honda reportedly wants a December defense in Japan, with the goal being reinstatement in the United States by the end of next year. If that happens, Honda hopes to

It looked like Valero might run out of gas, but he steadied himself and gradually took over the fight, and by the eighth round the seesaw contest had turned into a rout.

work with Golden Boy Promotions, which signed Valero before the failed MRI, on exposing his fighter to American fans.

But some feel Valero needs some fine-tuning. Hernandez, who helped work the corner in Panama City, saw a fighter who'd forgotten how to use the wealth of skills he so often displayed a couple years ago in California. He believes Valero, who has been with Venezuela-based Jorge Zerpa since mid-2005, needs a trainer who will command his respect.

"He was overconfident," Hernandez said. "There was no skills involved. He went in there, hands down. That's what he is—a lot of balls, good conditioning. He proved beyond a reasonable doubt that he can take any shot. But you can't go to war every day. You gotta set up the battles so you can win the war. He's gotta be smart, go in there and think."

Those Internet clips of Valero's L.A. sparring sessions reveal a much less reckless fighter. Instead of pawing with

Panamanian referee Luis Pabon rescued the battered Mosquera in the 10th round just as the stricken fighter's trainer, Francisco Arroyo, jumped into the ring to save his man from additional punishment.

his right jab, Valero used it to set up that wicked left. Instead of eating multiple shots to land one, he used good head and lateral movement to slip punches.

That old version of Valero is rumored to have hurt Morales in a sparring session south of the border. Hernandez said the youngster also got the better of Juan Lazcano and knocked out Urbano Antillon, now an 18-0 junior lightweight prospect.

"He had very little experience, but what he was showing in the gym, he was boxing like someone with experience and poise," Fischer said. "But he's not fighting like that now. He's fighting like a knockout artist. He's not boxing. He's just fighting. He's not living up to his potential. I think he's a superstar, if he uses his head."

But it could be tough to change someone who has had so much success recklessly throwing bombs, something encouraged by Honda, who offered Valero a $10,000 bonus for each first-round kayo. And if he doesn't change? Valero might never break into the pound-for-pound top 10, as some had predicted, but at least he'll remain fun to watch.

Watching him continues to be a chore in the United States, though. Back in February of 2001, well before the Steelers almost lost Big Ben for good, a helmet-less Valero crashed his motorcycle into a car that stopped in front of him. He flew off the bike, making a headfirst collision with the rear windshield of the car. After the accident, Valero underwent elective surgery to remove a small blood clot between his scalp and skull.

Given the go-ahead to resume fighting, the three-time Venezuelan amateur champion turned pro in July 2002. By January 2004, Valero was 12-0 with 12 first-round knockouts, under contract with Golden Boy, and cruising toward his U.S. television debut.

Then came the downer, the crash after the crash: Valero failed a routine MRI in New York on the eve of his U.S. television debut. The exam was said to have revealed brain trauma from the accident, as well as the subsequent epidural hematoma surgery. Suspended indefinitely in that state, he was forbidden to fight anywhere in the country due to the Ali Act, which forces all states to honor their counterparts' suspensions.

Valero's management team, which included Joel De La Hoya Sr., attempted an appeal. They used medical documents from Venezuela, as well as the diagnosis of doctors on the West Coast. Among those who cleared Valero was Dr. Robert Karns, a former physician for the California State Boxing Commission. "Do I think that Valero is in any danger?" Hernandez said. "No."

Ron Scott Stevens, the head of the New York State Athletic Commission, said his state reviewed the medical data supplied by Valero's team. However, he feels confident in the analysis of chief medical officer Dr. Barry Jordan, who is a neurologist, as well as his medical advisory board.

"The ringside physicians and the medical advisory board in New York are tops," Stevens said. "No one is happy that he's not allowed to fight. But at the same time, the doctors strongly recommend that he not be allowed to fight. He's at an increased risk. It's unfortunate. I know he was a great prospect. We never dreamt that this would be an issue, but it became one."

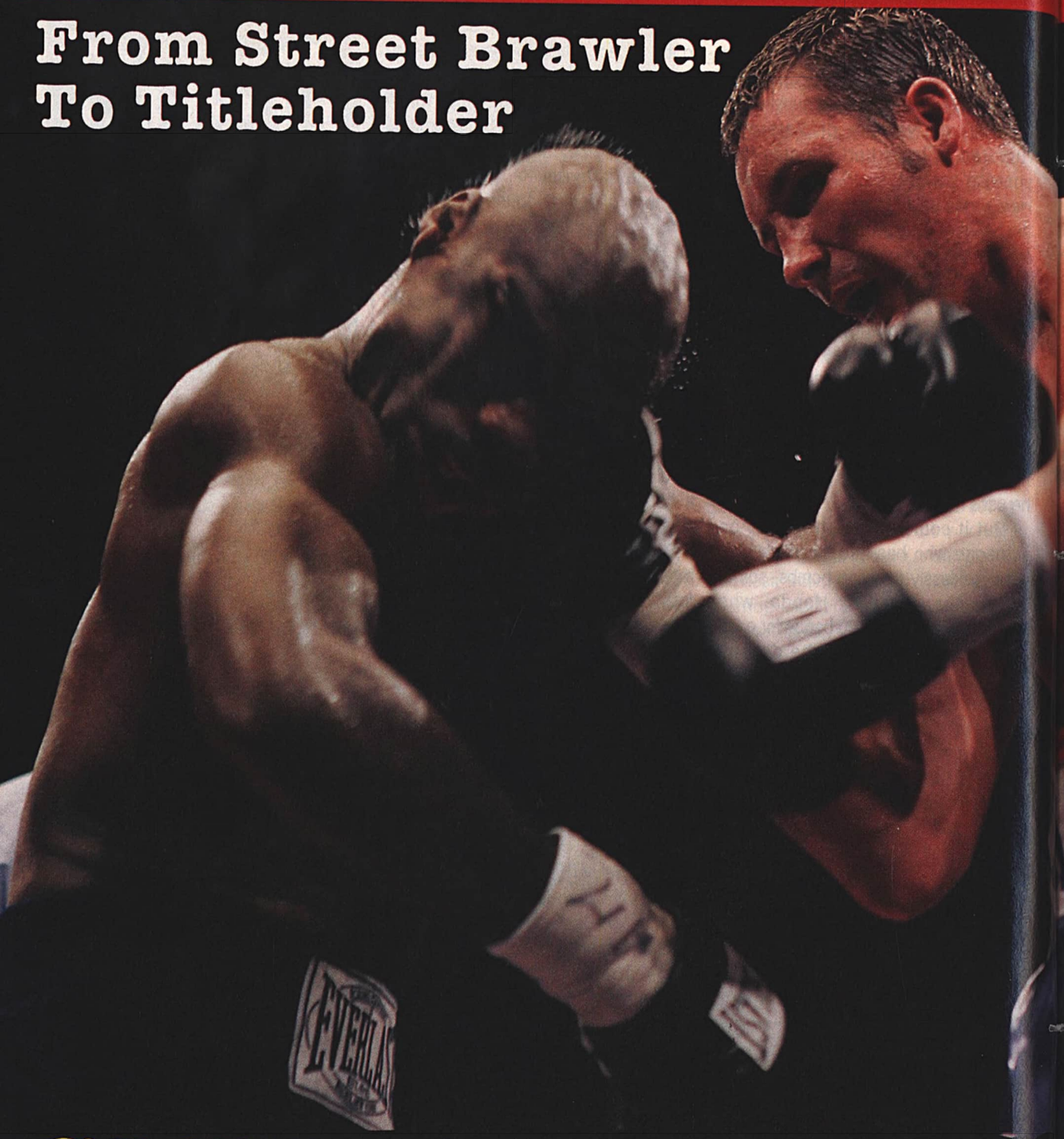
It's tough to compare Valero's case to that of heavyweight Joe Mesi, who, unlike Valero, was suspended after suffering bleeding on the brain during a fight. But Valero is expected to follow Mesi's precedent by allowing his California license to expire at the end of this year, thus technically ending his suspension. He'll then look to get licensed in the U.S. on a state-by-state basis, just as Mesi has done.

Even on the less-than-pristine Internet footage, it's tough not to notice the tattoo on Valero's right shoulder as he paws at Mosquera with his jab. The ink is an image of Jesus Christ taken from the crucifix at Nuevo San José.

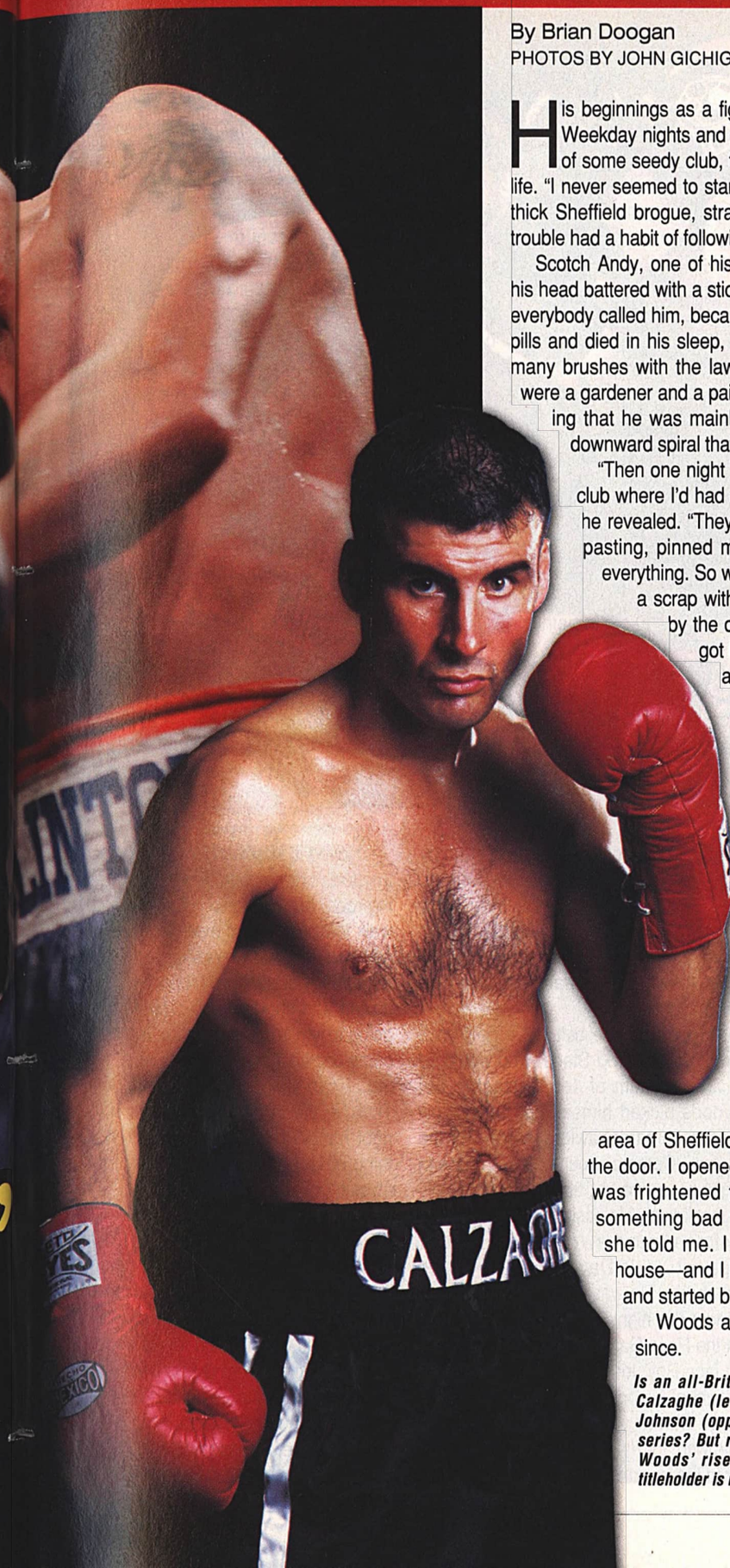
For Valero, it's a ready reminder of a promise made by a priest, and of a volcano with a deadly lava flow that couldn't quite destroy everything in its path. ■

Don Stewart covers boxing for the Reading (Pennsylvania) Eagle and is a regular contributor to this magazine.

From Street Brawler To Titleholder



CLINTON WOODS' ROCKY ROAD TO THE TOP



By Brian Doogan
PHOTOS BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

His beginnings as a fighter were the beginnings of many fighters. Weekday nights and weekends, outside a bar or in the backroom of some seedy club, fueled by booze and by the emptiness of his life. "I never seemed to start the trouble," Clinton Woods recalled in his thick Sheffield brogue, straight out of the movie *The Full Monty*, "but trouble had a habit of following me."

Scotch Andy, one of his mates, was killed breaking up a fight, "got his head battered with a stick." Another of his friends, "Japanese Sniper, everybody called him, because he looked like one," took an overdose of pills and died in his sleep, rather than face prison. Woods, despite his many brushes with the law, escaped with only community service. "I were a gardener and a painter sometimes," he explained, acknowledging that he was mainly a drinker and a brawler on a dangerous downward spiral that could only end one way.

"Then one night I were out in Chesterfield and ended up in a club where I'd had a run-in with bouncers the weekend before," he revealed. "They'd taken me to a room and gave me a right pasting, pinned me down, put fag (cigarette) burns on me, everything. So what do I do when I go back? I end up having a scrap with one of these bouncers. Eventually, helped by the other bouncers, he got me outside, a copper got hold of me, pulled my arms around my back and handcuffed me, laid me on the ground on my belly and shouted over to the bouncer, 'Come on then.' I can remember looking up and saying, 'Aw God,' just before the bouncer drove his boot into my right eye. Then he picked my head up by grabbing my hair and shoved his thumb in the eye—a swelling the size of an orange came up right away. 'I'm going to have you,' he said. I'd knocked his teeth out (with a headbutt before being handcuffed) and it ended up in court. I thought I might go down for it, but ended up getting community service again. I said to myself then and there, *I'm going to change my life.*

"A few days later I was sat in my flat in Westfield—people say it's a right rough area of Sheffield, but I loved it—and a letter came through the door. I opened it and it was from my mum. She said she was frightened to death because every time I went out, something bad was happening. 'You're ruining your life,' she told me. I put the letter away—I still have it in my house—and I found a gym not far from where I was living and started boxing."

Woods and trouble have avoided one another ever since.

Is an all-British showdown between Clinton Woods and Joe Calzaghe (left) coming up now that Woods has beaten Glen Johnson (opposite page) for the first time in their three-bout series? But regardless of anything that happens in the future, Woods' rise from street brawler to IBF light heavyweight titleholder is remarkable in itself.

Woods has Rico Hoye covering up during their March 2005 bout for the vacant IBF light heavyweight title, held in Rotherham, England. Woods emerged victorious by stopping Hoye in the fifth round.

●●●

Transformed in the twilight of his career from part-time fighter and longshoreman into world heavyweight champion and working-class hero; Jim Braddock, "The Cinderella Man," made the mold for Woods' brand of unyielding persistence. For his first pro fight in 1994, Woods was paid £240 (about $450). Out of his first 10 purses, the most money he made was £350 ($657).

"I got a grand for my 12th fight and I thought that were mega-money," he remembered with a smile. "Soon as I got paid, though, I owed it all to my girlfriend and my dad. They'd kept me going over the years."

So had his friend, Neil Port, whom he first met in a local gym when his only ambition was to lose weight. "I had 'man tits' hangin' down to the floor and a beer gut, but Neil, he became my trainer and treated me like a son, really, and he'd tell me, 'You're gonna be British champion,' and he'd tell other people the same, 'He's gonna be British champion,' and it used to embarrass me no end," Woods revealed. "He were in my corner when I won the vacant British Commonwealth super middleweight title and there weren't many happier men alive that night."

Woods lost the belt in his next bout, his 20th, to David Starie, who would be a future victim of Joe Calzaghe. But Woods picked himself up, beat fellow Yorkshireman Crawford Ashley for the British, Commonwealth, and European light heavyweight titles and gradually consolidated his position in the rankings before winning a WBC title eliminator against Yawe Davis, the Italy-based Ugandan. He was the mandatory challenger the night he walked into the ring at the Rose Garden in Portland, Oregon, to face Roy Jones, then at the supreme height of his powers. A sixth-round stoppage defeat was something he could live with, for he had fought the best fighter in the world.

"I loved it, absolutely loved it," Woods insisted. "I remember being in the dressing room not long before I was called to walk to the ring, and everybody in there with me, they were walking around like zombies. I suddenly stopped shadowboxing and shouted out, 'Come on, I'm going to win this.' I had no nerves at all. I came back after the second round thinking, *I can win this. I'm gonna win it.* Then, in the third, he caught me with a right hand, a horrible shot, and everything changed. But I still kept enjoying myself, doing an Ali shuffle, clownin'. He were like lightning, unbelievably quick. I couldn't see his shots coming. I didn't feel cheated at the time, but when it came out subsequently that he'd failed a drug test after fighting Richard Hall in Indianapolis in 2000 and it was covered up, well, I'm not saying I'd have beaten Roy Jones, but maybe he had an unfair advantage."

A year later, Woods was matched for the first time with Glen Johnson for the

vacant IBF light heavyweight title. They drew at the Hillsborough Leisure Centre in Woods' hometown before "The Road Warrior" from Miami, Florida, via Clarendon, Jamaica, earned a unanimous decision three months later. Woods believed that he was through with boxing.

"How I went 12 rounds in the second fight with Glencoffe, I'll never know. I was exhausted after a few rounds and it was the first time I was ever hurt," Woods revealed. "It took a doctor I know to diagnose an iron deficiency that was causing this tiredness. I was feeling tired in training and it had been that way for two years, even before I fought Jones. Since then I've felt great. I beat Rico Hoye for the belt after Glencoffe gave it up to fight Antonio Tarver, and I genuinely thought going into our third fight that I could beat him and show that I'm the best light heavyweight in the world."

The stakes were raised by Calzaghe's stated eagerness to move up in weight and challenge the winner. "I think it's a 50-50 fight," Calzaghe said on the eve of Woods-Johnson III at Bolton's Reebok Arena in Lancashire, England. "Johnson's not getting any younger and Clinton has improved a little and grown in confidence since he won the title. Johnson would be a bigger fight for me because he's knocked out Roy Jones and beaten Antonio Tarver, so he's known to the American audience. But I give Clinton a lot of credit. He was called 'a decent domestic fighter,' but he showed a lot of hunger and kept trying, and now he has his chance."

Woods asserted his jab early in the opening round, but Johnson retaliated strongly, digging in powerful left hooks to Woods' head and body, and swinging menacingly with his right hand. Woods struggled to counteract the raw strength of the Jamaican, which won Johnson the round, but Woods bounced back convincingly, driving in short hooks in the second round to let the challenger know that he could engage at close quarters too.

By the third round, it was clear that both men were willing to submit themselves to a battle of attrition, trading punch for punch, being forced to shake off one another's best shots and come back again. This was boxing in a dark, claustrophobic pit, a test of will and character. For the whole of the fourth round, Woods seemed to find himself backed against the ropes, battered there by powerful blows that might have been guided to their target by the aid of radar. In both precision and volume, Johnson was master.

But Woods, 40-3-1 (24), refused to be subdued, even after suffering the bruising effects of a withering assault by Johnson, 44-11-2 (29), in the fifth

Woods catches Roy Jones with a left hook during the early going of their September 2002 light heavyweight title fight. But the challenger's success was short-lived and Jones stopped Woods in the sixth round.

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

Johnson got off to a great start and built an early lead as he relentlessly pounded the Englishman (above). But the 37-year-old challenger faded down the stretch, which allowed the 34-year-old Woods to rally back (below) and retain the title with a split decision.

Woods and his corner celebrate as referee Howard John Foster raises his arm in victory. Meanwhile, Johnson's disappointment is plainly visible. "The Road Warrior" has come out on the wrong end of a lot of close decisions, but this one was especially galling, as he'd beaten and drawn with Woods in their two previous encounters.

and sixth rounds. In the seventh he picked his punches better, landing two right hands in particular that slowed Johnson's 37-year-old legs. But Johnson was back in control in the eighth and inflicted an unmerciful hammering in the ninth. It was the biggest round of the fight for either man. Woods' ordeal began when he took a left-right to the jaw that forced him to the ropes again. Two follow-up left hooks caused his knees to dip and a remorseless attack by the Jamaican pushed Woods to the precipice. He staggered all around the ring and his refusal to go down was almost heroic. But Johnson's lead was now firmly established and a big turnaround was required by Woods to hold on to the title.

Bravely, he dug in his heels in the 10th, taking another battery of blows from Johnson before firing back with conviction and forcing the challenger to hold on. Both men were on the brink of exhaustion, but Woods, 175, the younger man by three years, was able to find something special at the bottom of the well, hurting Johnson, 172, with a tremendous left hook to the jaw in the penultimate round and following up with a barrage of hooks that had Johnson almost out on his feet at the bell. Woods kept up the pressure on his rapidly diminishing foe throughout the final round, at the end of which he raised his arms in expectation. Many of the rounds were incredibly close and the judges were split in their decision, Mickey Vann of England scoring 115-113 for Johnson, while American judge Ric Bays and Roberto Ramirez of Puerto Rico making it 115-112 and 116-112, respectively, for Woods. THE RING narrowly favored Johnson, 115-113, but it was a thrilling bout that could have gone either way.

Speculation about an all-British encounter in the spring between Woods and Calzaghe dominated the aftermath. "I would be more than ready to fight Clinton and I know that I would be too good for him," said Calzaghe. "He did well to beat Johnson and it was an exciting fight, but it would be very different for him against me. The key would be my speed. I would simply be too fast for him."

But Woods has heart, a quality that he perhaps inherited from his father, Keith. "He came through a quadruple heart bypass operation only four days before the fight and he insisted on coming and sitting ringside," Woods revealed. "He survived—and so did I."

He has become one of the great survivors, a modern-day Cinderella Man, a glorious example of what can be achieved with an honest work ethic and a dogged unwillingness to give up. "If the money's right, I'll fight Calzaghe, no problem," Woods declared. "A clash between two British fighters, the best in their divisions, what more could you ask for? It would just be nice if Neil had still been around to see this. He said I'd be British champion one day and no one believed him. Now I have the IBF title, I've beaten Glen Johnson, and I know he'd be bursting with pride." ■

Brian Doogan is The Ring's European correspondent.

Once The Mind Goes, The Body Will Follow

BOXING'S MASTERS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

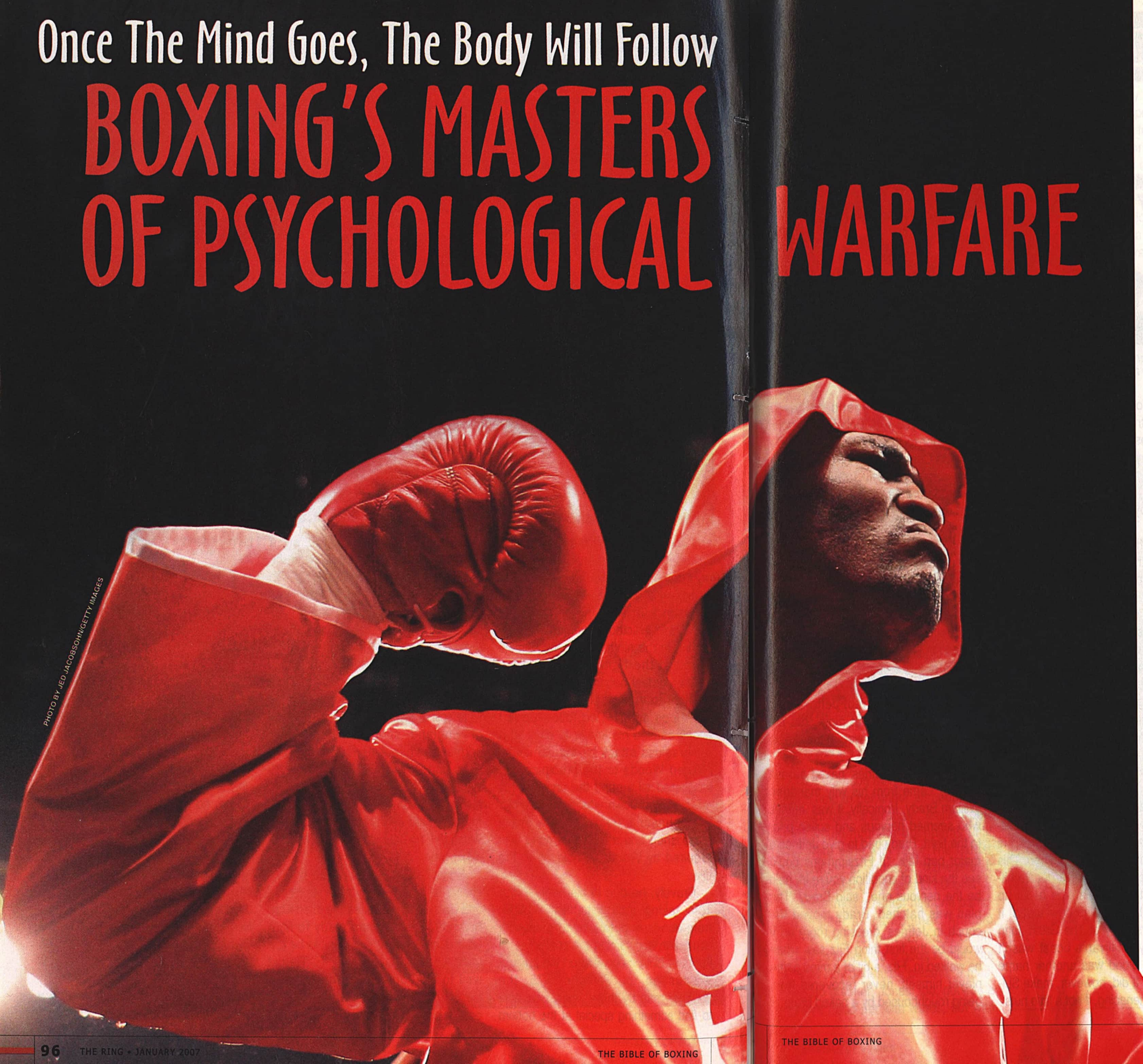


PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

By Don Stradley

Boxing lost more than a future Hall of Famer when Bernard Hopkins announced his retirement after winning the light heavyweight championship. Hopkins' exit means we've lost one of the true masters of psychological warfare. Oh sure, Hasim Rahman talks some good smack, but he'd get more credit if he actually won a fight once in a while. James Toney's edgy act worked better when he was younger; lately his words are slurred to the point where he needs subtitles. Hands down, Hopkins was the modern king of the mental whammy. He was probably the best in two decades.

Hopkins' mind game went far beyond his executioner's mask. He could speak two different kinds of trash—the standard type made up of threats and anger, and a more subtle type that was guaranteed to drive rivets into an opponent's mind. He'd fight dirty. He'd insult your race and throw your country's flag to the ground. He'd remind you that he'd been in prison, and survived by finding the toughest guy in the yard and knocking his teeth down his throat. He'd make bold side bets with opponents. In his later years, Hopkins' opponents believed this mouthy ex-con was going to unleash all kinds of hell on them. While they were overly cautious during the early rounds, Hopkins used the time to get his old bones warmed up.

Gaining the mental edge is like landing a solid punch before the opening bell. It gives your opponent something to think about other than your fists. It may inflame his temper and make him reckless. It may make him feel insecure. It might take him right out of his fight plan. Veteran trainer and ESPN2 analyst Teddy Atlas knows well the effects of a good mind game.

"I've had many fighters, even successful ones, who were affected," said Atlas. "If you've been

Over the past two decades, Bernard Hopkins has been boxing's leading practitioner of psychological warfare. From intimidation to trash talk, "The Executioner" has gotten under his opponents' skin with more ferocity and frequency than any other fighter of his era.

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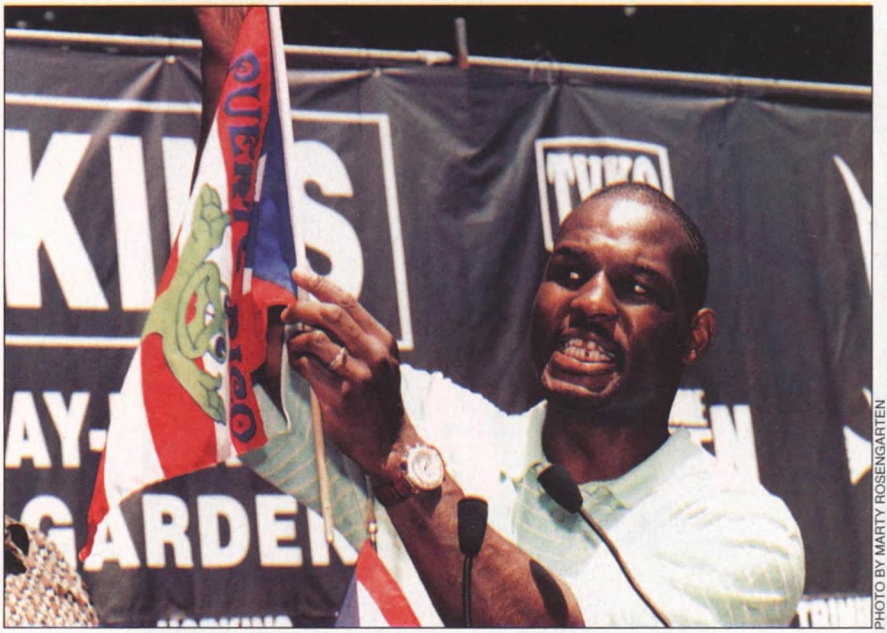


PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Hopkins was at his aggravating best leading up to his showdown with Felix Trinidad, especially when he threw the Puerto Rican flag to the ground following one of his trademark verbal assaults.

around it, you can see the symptoms. If you're a trainer, you have to understand the psychological playing field. You see it by the questions they ask or don't ask. If a talkative guy is suddenly not talking, that tells you something. You see it by the way they perform up to the fight. They might avoid training. That way they'll have an excuse; they'll say they didn't train right. You can see it in their actions that something is on their mind. They'll start fighting the wrong fight, and use that as an excuse too. They'll say, 'I just fought the wrong fight,' but they've been psychologically undermined."

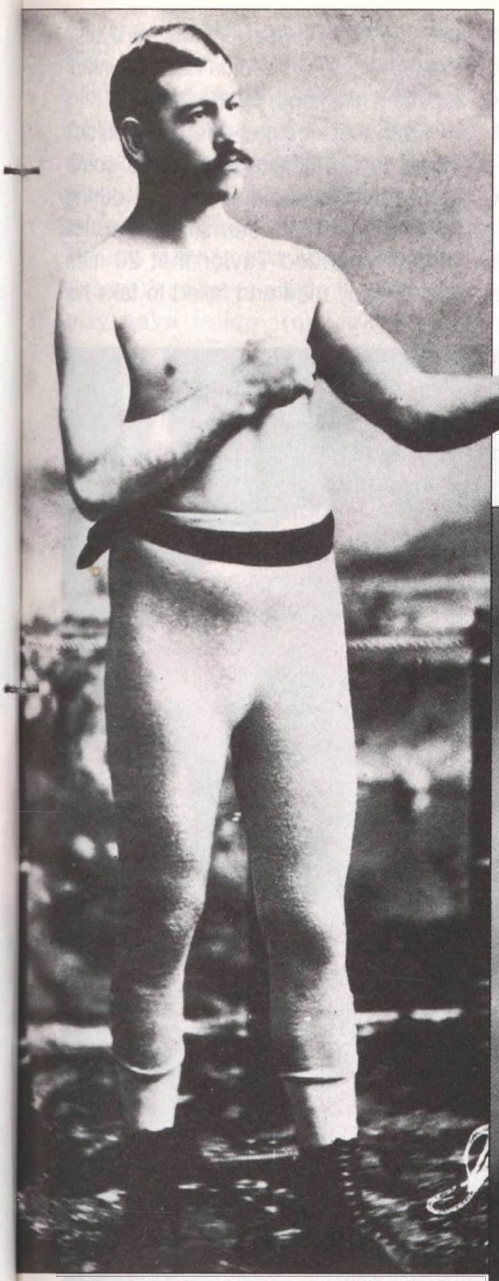
When Atlas suspects a fighter is succumbing to an opponent's mind games, he jumps in before the verbal barbs take root. "You have to tell him that people have been there before. Tell them it's normal."

Fighters have been playing mind games for a long time. Boxing's first superstar, John L. Sullivan, once boasted to a Boston newspaper that his strength came from drinking blood. This not only inspired a wave of local children to visit butcher shops to fill up empty milk bottles with cow blood, it made fighters leery of The Great John L. Obviously, Sullivan's boast wasn't true (unless blood was another name for whiskey). It did, however, make Sullivan seem menacing, if not a little nuts.

Heavyweight legend James J. Jeffries played with Bob Fitzsimmons' mind prior to their 1899 championship bout on Coney Island. While waiting in his dressing room, Jeffries had his manager lure Fitz in for a prefight chat. Fitz entered Jeffries' room and was shocked to see the massive Jeffries reclining nude on a couch. Jeffries, in hairy, nude splendor, asked Fitz how he wanted to handle clinches. Fitzsimmons was speechless.

"We can break easily or like this," said Jeffries, jumping up to grab Fitz in a bearhug before shoving him across the room like a rag doll. Fitz, looking pale and nervous, agreed that a gentler way was preferred. Jeffries won the championship that night, but the fight may have been won in the dressing room.

The idea for Jeffries' naked assault actually came from his wily manager, William Brady. Ironically, it was Jeffries who seemed nervous and sullen prior to the fight. Brady had to give Jeffries a major pep talk. "If Fitzsimmons could see the kind of condition you're in, he'd be the nervous one," said Brady. The plan was hatched. Brady moved the couch in Jeffries' dressing room so it would be the first thing Fitz saw when he walked in. Fitz, a bit of a mind game player himself, never recovered from being roughhoused by a naked brute.



Not only did John L. Sullivan boast that he could "lick any son of a bitch in the house," he also freaked out opponents by claiming he drank blood to give him strength.

Jack Johnson never needed a manager's help to get under an opponent's skin. Johnson's arrogant, smiling persona would infuriate opponents until they were blind with rage. The harder they swung at Johnson, the easier it was for him to chop them to ribbons.

Sometimes a fighter has one particular fighter he can bother. Antonio Tarver was content for most of his career to simply be a good fighter. But against Roy Jones, he became a master mind-breaker. Jones, too, got into a fighter's head not with words, but with his reputation. Most fighters were so intimidated by Jones' speed that they would literally freeze in front of him, afraid to throw a punch.

A reputation is handy when you're trying to mess with an opponent's mind. Joe Louis could spook a fighter without saying a word. Because Louis left a trail of broken heavyweights behind him, some of his opponents were so scared, they had to be shoved down the aisle to face him. Roberto Duran had a similar reputation during his years as lightweight champion, as well as a salty personality that made opponents nervous.

Duran's reputation even worked on a tough guy like Marvin Hagler. What else could account for Hagler's less than scintillating performance against Duran in their 1984 middleweight bout? Rather than charge in and overwhelm his aging opponent, Hagler laid back and counterpunched, winning the fight on points. The reason? Duran's old reputation as a puncher was deeply ingrained in Hagler's bald head.

Sonny Liston, the young George Foreman, and Mike Tyson each had fierce reputations that fractured an opponent's psyche before a punch was thrown. Of course, the first time they met someone who wasn't afraid of them, they were handed an embarrassing loss, and from then on their reputations were not quite so fearsome. Once Tyson's reputation as a tough guy was shattered, however, he developed a new mental game—he became a psycho lunatic. Tyson's demented behavior probably helped him beat a few of his later opponents. It didn't work against Lennox Lewis, or Kevin McBride for that matter, but we'll bet Andrew Golota had a few nightmares about Mental Mike. Don King once said another fighter belonged on the intimidation list along with Foreman and Tyson. That was Muhammad Ali.

Many of Ali's opponents entered the ring already defeated, King said during a 1988 *Playboy* interview. "Most of the guys who went in against him looked at Ali and just felt he was unbeatable," said King. Not only did Ali have the boxing ability to make any fighter look foolish, he also had the instincts of a playground bully. Some of Ali's opponents fell apart because they couldn't deal with the magnitude of the event. Joe Bugner, who fought Ali twice, said, "When you're actually fighting him, it's a bit of a terror."

Even before they got into the ring for their heavyweight title fight, Jim Jeffries had a big, hairy naked surprise for Bob Fitzsimmons.

All super-confident heavyweight champ Jack Johnson (right) had to do to unnerve a lot of his adversaries was to laugh at them.

Of course, a few fighters weren't bothered by Ali's reputation or his mind games. Ken Norton was either too thick or too confident to be affected by Ali's banter. Their three-fight series, unfortunately, was on the dull side. Some think Norton won all three. Some think Ali won all three. We're just happy there wasn't a fourth. So was Ali. When the usually witty Ali saw Norton, he'd only draw a blank. He couldn't even think of a decent nickname for the guy.

Even Hopkins met a few he couldn't seem to break. Hopkins used some incredible psychological ploys during his two fights with Jermain Taylor. He grimly reminded Taylor that 20 men had already tried and failed to take his

Sonny Liston had such a menacing persona, many foes, including Floyd Patterson, were virtually cowed into defeat before the fight started.

middleweight title, and that Taylor was too inexperienced. He said Taylor was programmed by his handlers and had no thoughts of his own. Then Hopkins got nastier. He promised Taylor "either a short night or a slow death." But mind games didn't work on Taylor. Hopkins hadn't been able to unnerve Oscar De La Hoya either. De La Hoya may have fallen from a Hopkins bodyshot, but he seemed indifferent to Hopkins' threats prior to their fight.

De La Hoya has always been a cool customer. Julio Cesar Chavez, Fernando Vargas, and Ricardo Mayorga all tried to mess with "The Golden Boy's" head. And they succeeded to some degree. But when fight time arrived, De La Hoya's left hook leveled all three of those bullies.

So who falls for mind games and who doesn't?

"Nobody is completely immune," said Atlas. "The fighters who are the most immune are the ones who control themselves. They aren't impacted psychologically, because they understand what the secrets are. They know what's important. The guys who depend only on physical ability, and aren't as developed psychologically, those are the ones who are most vulnerable to somebody being able to goad them, and undermine and weaken them.

"Every one feels it," he said. "If you're human, you have emotions. Jermain felt it, but his background, what he'd been through in his life, had formed him. His amateur career, being on the Olympic team, the confidence you gain from that strengthens you. All of those things combined to help him realize what was important in the ring."

As for De La Hoya, "He was like a lawyer who presented his case," said Atlas. "All that mattered was the study

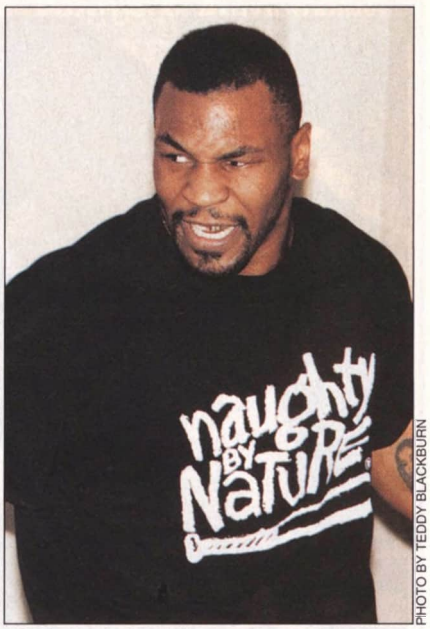
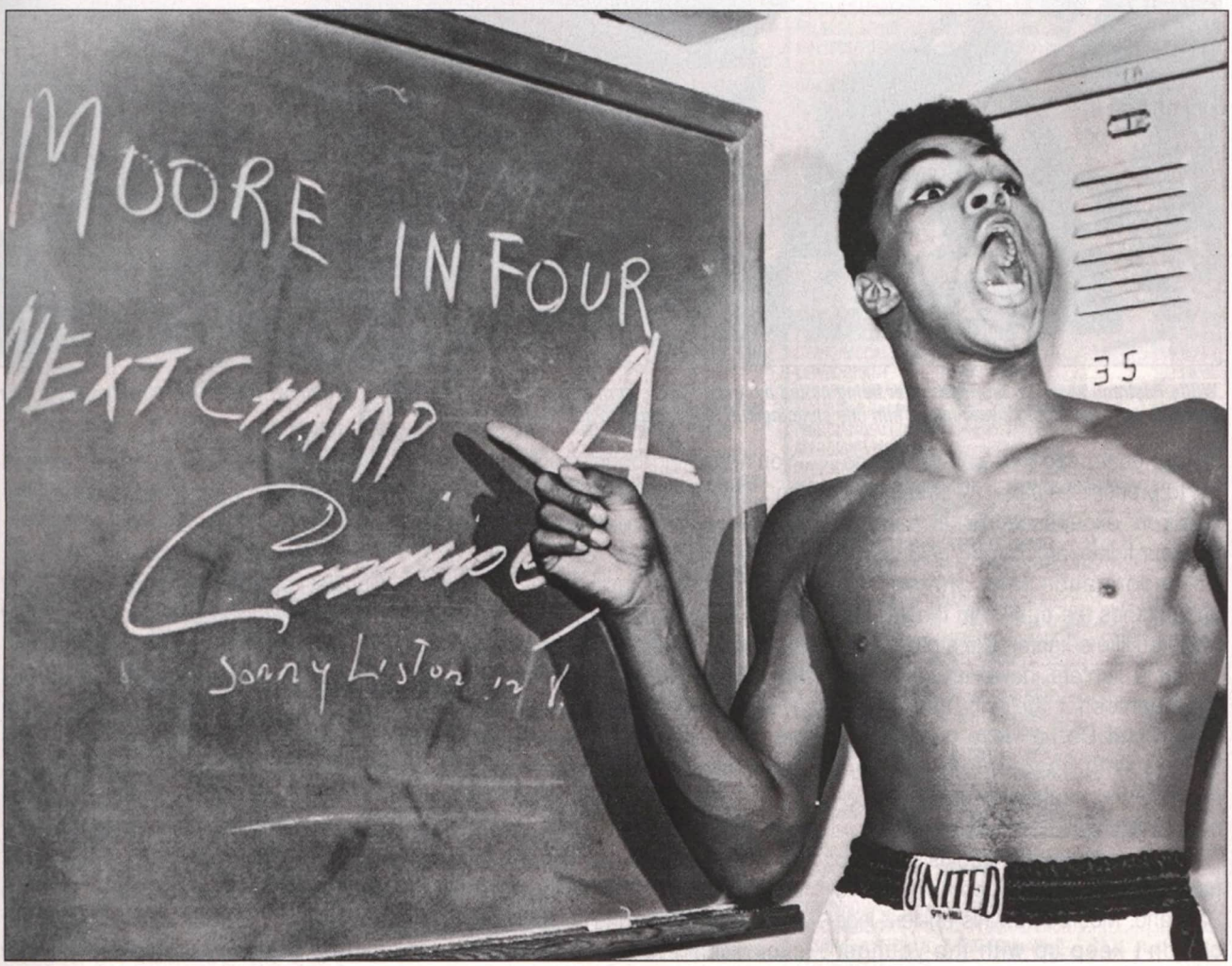


PHOTO BY TEDDY BLACKBURN

There was a time when Mike Tyson also scared most of his opponents, but when the losses began to mount and his aura of invincibility eroded, Iron Mike switched to acting crazy, perhaps hoping it would compensate.



Muhammad Ali was another master of psychological warfare. He started with predictions and poems, and proceeded to build from there. And as his legend grew, many opponents believed Ali was unbeatable.

Willie Pastrano sags into the ropes after being belted by Archie Moore during their 1962 bout that ended in a draw. The speedy Pastrano would have probably won, but Moore sweet-talked him into standing still long enough to get hit with a bomb.

he had done, and the way he was going to present his case. He understood that from experience. Oscar had 200 amateur fights, an Olympic gold medal. He understands what matters. He understands the truth from the lies. He behaved like a fighter, like a pro."

Some fighters, however, save their mind games for the fight itself. Even Taylor and De La Hoya would have trouble with someone like Archie Moore, who could get into an opponent's mind while the fists were flying.

Moore showed his genius for mind games during his 1962 bout with Willie Pastrano. Moore knew his ancient legs couldn't keep up with the younger Pastrano, so he started his psychological assault. He whispered to Pastrano, "You're looking good, kid. Keep dancing." Moore kept a steady patter going for a couple of rounds. Finally, Moore whispered, "Stand still." As if under hypnosis, Pastrano remained still. Then Moore nailed him with a right hand that nearly sent Pastrano through the ropes. "The Old Mongoose" earned a draw that night, in large part because he played the mental game so well. Pastrano never forgot Archie.

"He was a wise old man," Pastrano said during a 1970 interview with Peter Heller. He pointed out that Moore could work on your mind even when he'd been hurt. Referring to the epic punchout with Yvonne Durelle that saw Moore hit the canvas four times before the fifth bell, Pastrano recounted, "In between rounds, he moved his second to the side so he can look right directly into Durelle's eyes. Durelle just had him down. He's looking at Durelle, and Durelle's saying: *Oh, my God. I just hit this guy with my best punch. Look at him; he's ready to go again.* Then Durelle started looking for a soft spot on the canvas. He got out on one knee. He quit. He could've gone further, but he quit. Archie took the guts out of him."

Perhaps a new boxing term should be affixed to certain fighters. Along with glass jaws, it seems that a lot of pugs have had glass minds. ■

Don Stradley is a freelance writer from Massachusetts and a regular contributor to this magazine.

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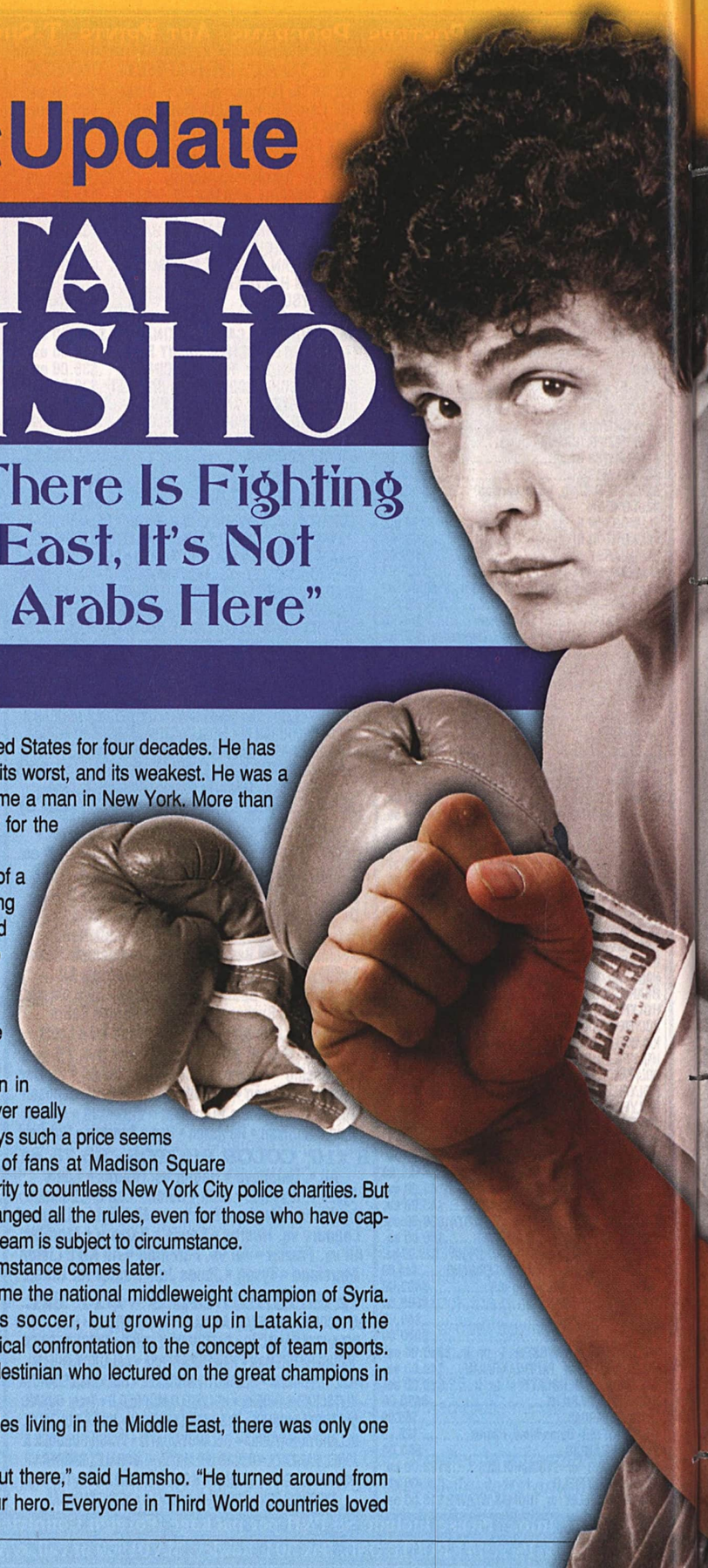
The RING :Update

MUSTAFA HAMSHO

"As Long As There Is Fighting In The Middle East, It's Not Helping Us As Arabs Here"

By Robert Cassidy



Mustafa Hamsho has lived in the United States for four decades. He has experienced this country at its best, its worst, and its weakest. He was a boy when he left Syria and he became a man in New York. More than that, he became the number-one contender for the middleweight championship of the world.

But no one is immune to the insecurities of a nation when it is trapped in fear and seething with hatred, not even someone as tough and respected as Hamsho. Yes, Hamsho became a United States citizen over 20 years ago, but his birthplace will always be Syria. In these times and, sadly, in some places, he still pays a price for that.

Being an Arab in the United States, even in the melting pot that is New York City, is never really knowing friend from enemy. That Hamsho pays such a price seems odd for a man who has thrilled thousands of fans at Madison Square Garden and who has lent his name and celebrity to countless New York City police charities. But the tragic events of September 11, 2001, changed all the rules, even for those who have captured the American dream. These days, the dream is subject to circumstance.

First, let's talk about the dream. The circumstance comes later.

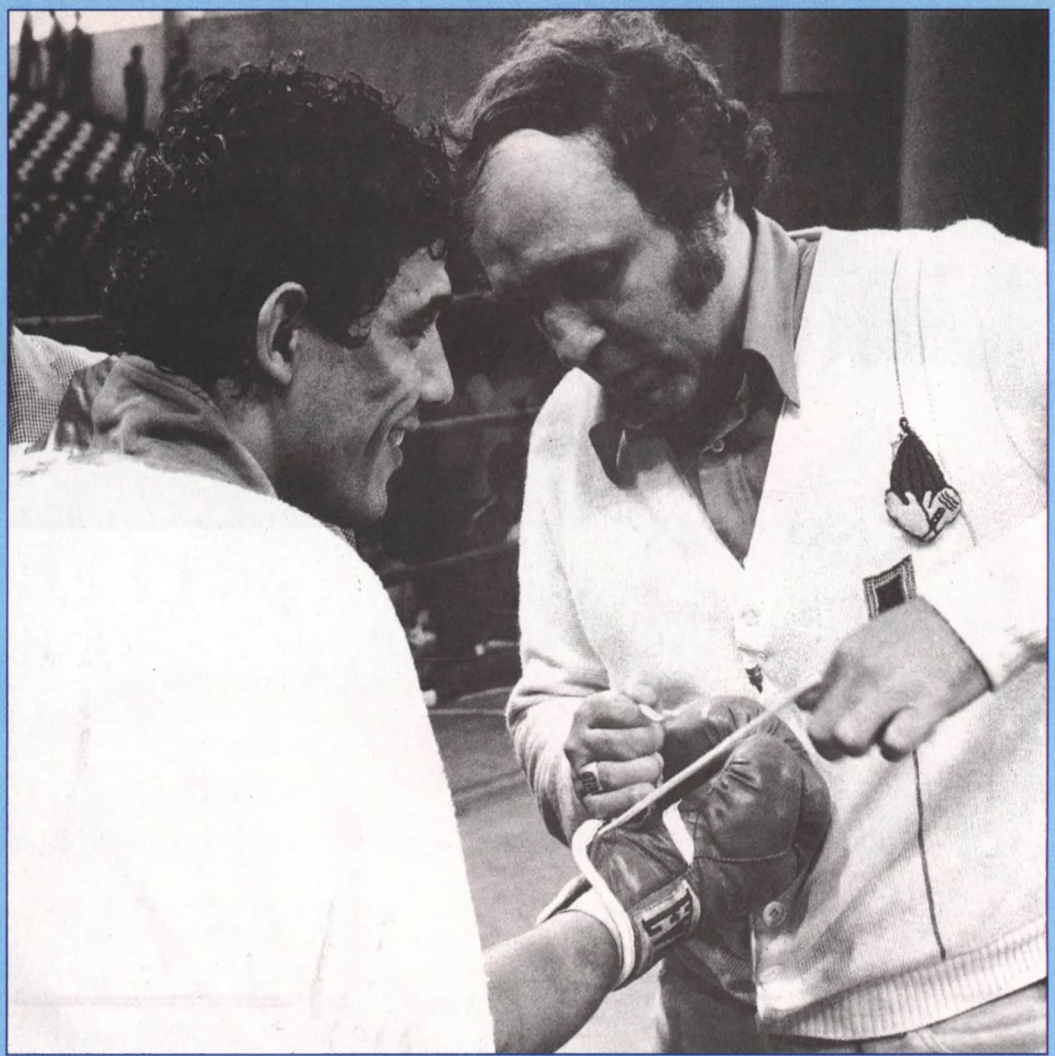
Hamsho was 14 years old when he became the national middleweight champion of Syria. The only other viable sport at home was soccer, but growing up in Latakia, on the Mediterranean coast, Hamsho favored physical confrontation to the concept of team sports. He took to the ring and was trained by a Palestinian who lectured on the great champions in history, particularly Sugar Ray Robinson.

To Hamsho and most young Muslim males living in the Middle East, there was only one true champion—Muhammad Ali.

"Muhammad Ali was the biggest name out there," said Hamsho. "He turned around from Cassius Clay to being a Muslim. He was our hero. Everyone in Third World countries loved

Then and now: Hamsho in the early-1980s when he was a leading middleweight contender, and today, posing at his home in Brooklyn and looking more like a cruiserweight.

PHOTO BY CHRIS CASSIDY



Hamsho and trainer Paddy Flood, who became a mentor and father figure to the young boxer from Syria. Flood tried to change Hamsho's name to "Mike Estafire" to hide his Arab identity, but it didn't stick.

this guy. When he fought, no one slept. We stayed awake until 4 a.m. to watch the highlights of his fights."

Hamsho wanted a future in boxing, but realized he'd have to leave Syria to achieve it. His Palestinian coach also worked on a Swedish cruise ship, so Hamsho began working as a seaman. He was 15 when he left home. He first attempted to settle in Liverpool, England, but was locked up by immigration police and sent home because he was an Arab.

There would be unsuccessful attempts to stay in Rhode Island and then Venezuela. Finally, the ship dry-docked for six months at a pier in Red Hook, Brooklyn. Hamsho occasionally snuck off the vessel to visit the thriving Arab community on Atlantic Avenue, one of the borough's main thoroughfares.

"Finally," said Hamsho, "I jumped ship for good."

• • •

Now, the circumstances.

Today, Hamsho still lives in Brooklyn, just a few miles from Ground Zero. On that horrific day five years ago, the dust cloud from the collapsing towers could be seen from his neighborhood. In the immediate aftermath of the terror attacks, he feared for the safety of his children and personally drove them to school each day.

"God forbid something should happen to children," he said. "I don't want to see any kids get hurt. Kids have nothing to do with it."

Hamsho has seven children, and his oldest daughter, Suzanne, was insulted verbally after the attack on the World Trade Center. She called him on the phone and said, "Daddy, please be careful, they are going to kill Arabs."

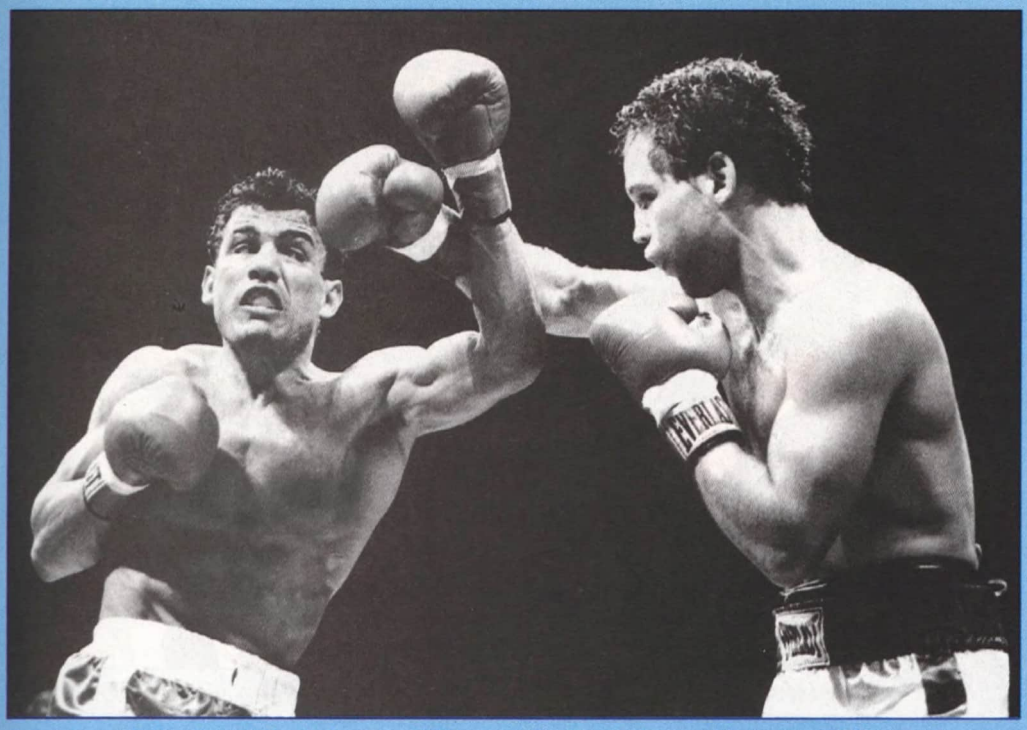
Hearing the fear in his daughter's voice shook Hamsho's soul. Also around the time of the attacks, a man approached Hamsho's home and began shouting anti-Arab epithets at him. "I had to smack him," he said. "But the police came and they ended up locking him up."

Despite what could be considered a betrayal by the very city Hamsho adopted and adored, he volunteered to help when Steve Farhood, a boxing analyst for Showtime and a Lebanese-American, organized a fundraiser at Gleason's Gym called "Counterpunch." The event brought back numerous veteran fighters from the New York and New Jersey area to stage a series of exhibitions at Gleason's Gym. The money raised would go to the Twin Towers Fund, which assists family members of the police, fire, and rescue workers lost on that day. At the press conference to announce the event, Hamsho began to cry.

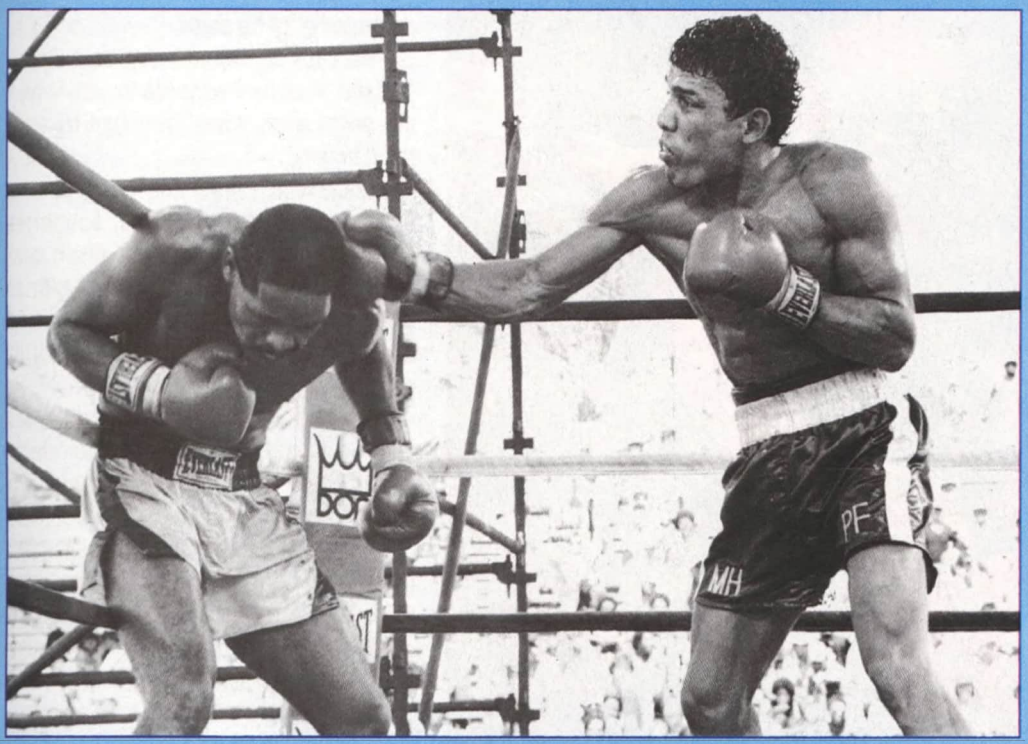
"When Mustafa broke down during the press conference for 'Counterpunch' benefit, I was surprised," said Farhood. "But his emotions showed how deeply 9/11 had affected him and his family. The pain was too much for a father to bear."

"The prejudice against Mustafa has always been there," said Al Certo, who was part of Hamsho's team from the beginning. "Every time they raised gas prices in the U.S., they took it out on Mustafa. I know he felt it around 9/11."

On the night of the fundraiser, Hamsho stepped back into the ring for an exhibition with Bobby Czyz, a man he defeated, no, demoralized, 19 years earlier.



Hamsho hands Bobby Czyz his first defeat in a 1982 bout held in Atlantic City and televised by NBC (above). Less than a year later, Hamsho pounded out a 12-round decision over future Hall of Famer Wilfred Benitez (below).



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In 1976, after eight pro bouts, Hamsho had a record of 5-1-2. His career changed when he met Paddy Flood at the Gramercy Gym in Lower Manhattan.

"Every time I sparred with this tough young middleweight, Flood would see that I was pushing this kid back," said Hamsho. "One day he asked me, 'What's your name?' I said Mustafa. He said. 'What?' I said Mustafa. He said, 'No, no, no, we'll call you Mike. Mike Estafire."

Flood realized it was problematic to move an Arab fighter and that Hamsho was still not a citizen lent credence to concealing his identity. When asked if he agreed with the change in name, Hamsho said, "I don't know. I just wanted someone to watch me train. Paddy was very nice, he was very kind. When you finished training, he bought you a cup of tea. At that time, tea was like 25 cents or 30 cents. To me, it was a lot of money."

Flood was one of boxing's great Runyonesque characters, a big-hearted Irishman whom writer Mike Katz once described as " ... vintage New York wise guy. He grew up on the streets and on the docks and had more angles than a geometry professor." A father-son bond developed between Flood and Hamsho. They often ate dinner together after training, and Hamsho usually drove Flood to the racetrack so he could play the horses.

Hamsho's breakthrough fight came against Philly veteran Bobby "Boogaloo" Watts, a perennial contender who was five fights removed from defeating Marvin Hagler. Flood and Certo, the matchmaker, did a fantastic job securing the fight.

"I didn't know Bobby 'Boogaloo' Watts, but at this point I'd fight anybody," said Hamsho. "They took me to Certo's office in Secaucus, New Jersey, and they took my picture. But they made me stand in an orthodox stance. Not southpaw. No one knew anything about me, and Watts' manager wanted to see a picture of me."

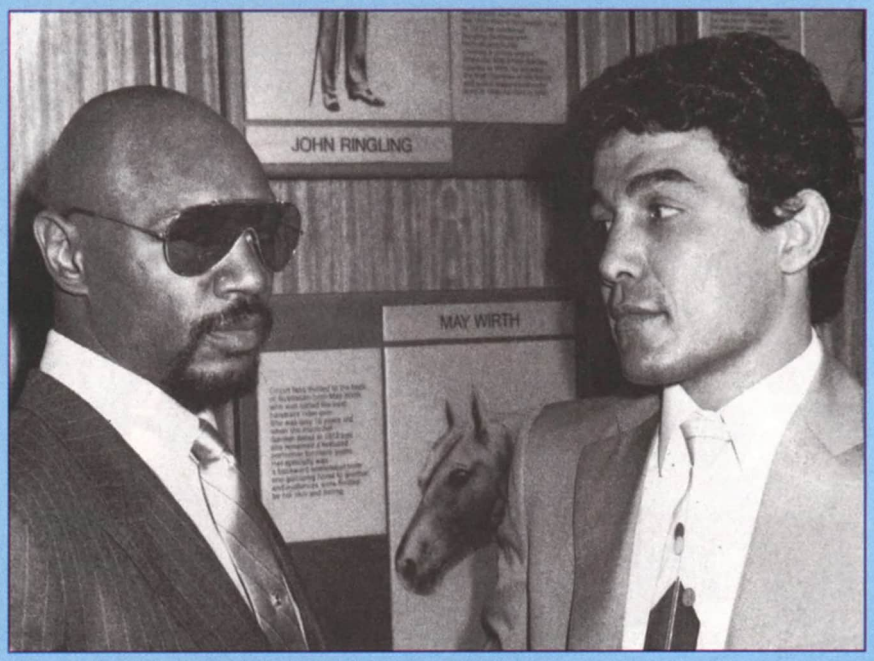
Based on that photograph, Watts agreed to the fight.

"People said to me, 'Are you crazy? You are fighting this guy?'" recalled Hamsho. "When we got into the ring, Watts looked at me and said to his manager, 'I said no southpaws!' His manager said, 'It's too late now.' The

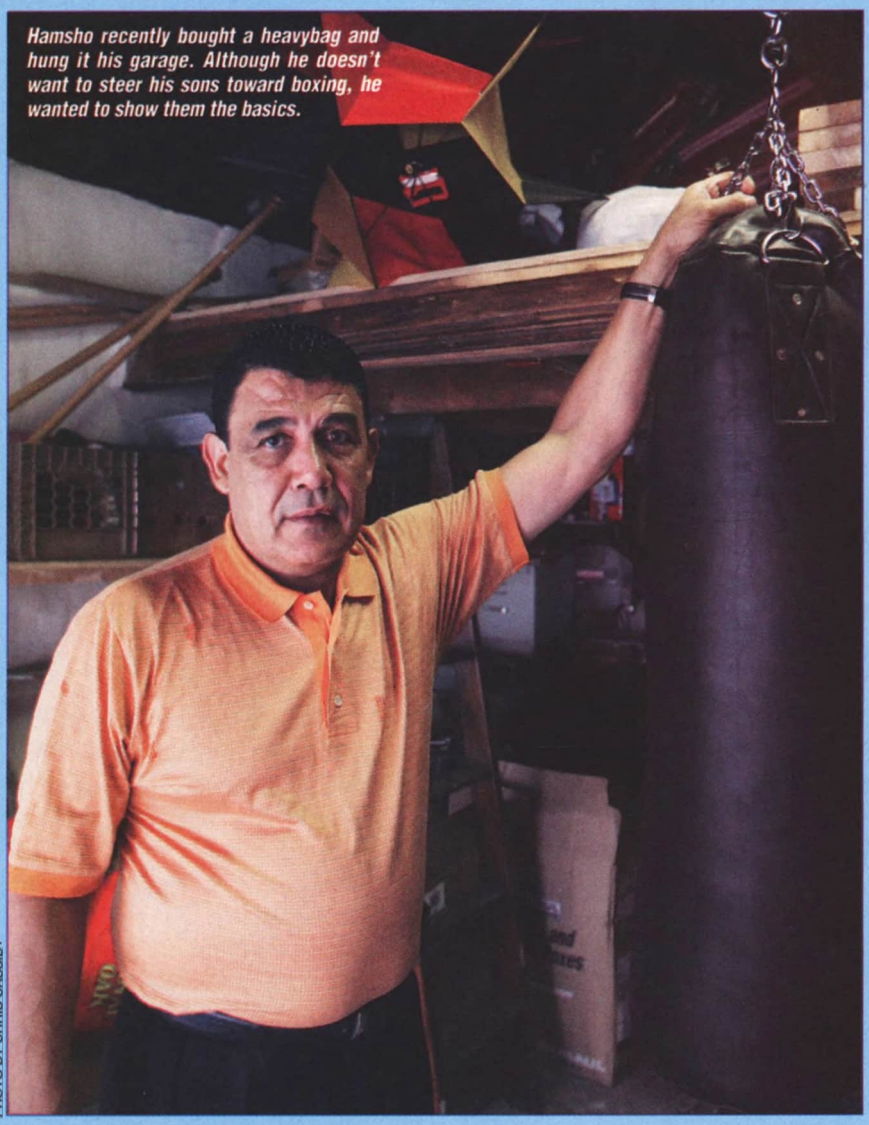
first right hand he hit me with, it felt like his hand was coming out the back of my head. That's how hard it was. When I came back to the corner, Paddy said to me, 'We're not coming here to let this guy beat you. I don't want you to come back to the corner until you do your best.'"

Hamsho's best was a sixth-round knockout. From that fight on, Mike "Rocky" Estafire ceased to exist and Hamsho marched steadily toward a title fight. He put together a 17-fight winning streak, beating Wilford Scypion, Curtis Park, and Alan Minter.

Hamsho, who fought from 1975-'89 and retired with a record of 44-5-2 (28), was an aggressive, swarming puncher who made action fights. In the ring, he took no prisoners and that approach often landed him in the role as the bad guy. When asked if that bothered him, Hamsho smiled and shrugged. "I just came to fight," he said.



Hagler and Hamsho hype their second fight. The pair didn't like each other back then, but when they met recently at the Hall of Fame, they formed a friendship.



Hamsho recently bought a heavybag and hung it his garage. Although he doesn't want to steer his sons toward boxing, he wanted to show them the basics.

PHOTO BY CHRIS CASSIDY

"He was so determined," said Certo. "He did what he had to do to win. When the chips were down, he might try anything to win."

NBC, which was televising boxing every weekend at the time, sought to cast Hamsho in the role of villain and gave him national exposure against Scypion. Hamsho dominated the fight and won by disqualification in the 10th round.

"It was my first big TV fight and NBC wanted to see how many Arabic fans would show up and support me," he said. "Detroit had a very big Arabic community, so that's why the fight was held there." Hamsho pauses for effect and said, "One Arabic guy showed up."

Nonetheless, he was gaining the attention of the fight crowd and a decision win over Minter led to Hamsho's 1981 fight against Hagler, the first of two times he would challenge the future Hall of Famer for the middleweight title. The fight was stopped in the 11th round due to cuts.

"In the first fight, I let him beat me," said Hamsho. "I wanted to show him how tough I was and I let him hit me with every shot. He saw that I didn't move. If it wasn't for the blood, I would have fought him all day."

After the loss, Hamsho beat Parker again and then dominated Czyz, who was being billed by NBC as boxing's matinee idol. The 20-0 Czyz was overmatched and lost a unanimous decision. Hamsho seemed to get pleasure out of pounding boxing's golden boy of the moment and that merely enhanced his bad-boy image.

Hamsho was headed for another title shot when tragedy struck. Flood died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 48 and Hamsho lost his best friend and mentor.

"It's very hard when you lose someone you care about and someone you know cares about you," said Hamsho. "He was like my big brother."

Three months after Flood's death, Hamsho scored a unanimous decision over Wilfred Benitez to secure a rematch with Hagler. The champion was also no stranger to fighting rugged, and Hamsho was determined to foul Hagler every time he perceived the champion had violated the rules. The bout was marred by several headbutts before Hagler scored a stunning third-round knockout.

For years, Hamsho carried around the animosity from that fight. In 2005, he was invited to the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York, and finally had a chance to speak with Hagler. "We never talked," said Hamsho. "I never liked him, and he never liked me. After we met, it was different completely. The guy is very kind. We spent a few days together. We sat down and laughed. I tell him I don't know why you don't like me *(laughs)*."

Many experts believe that if not for the reign of Hagler, one of the best 160-pounders in history, Hamsho would have captured the middleweight crown.

"He was good enough to beat everyone else," said Certo. "If Hagler weren't around, there was no question Mustafa would have been a champion."

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Since 1979, Syria has been on the State Department's list of countries that sponsor terrorism. It has also been accused of supplying Hezbollah with weapons and money in its ongoing conflict with Israel.

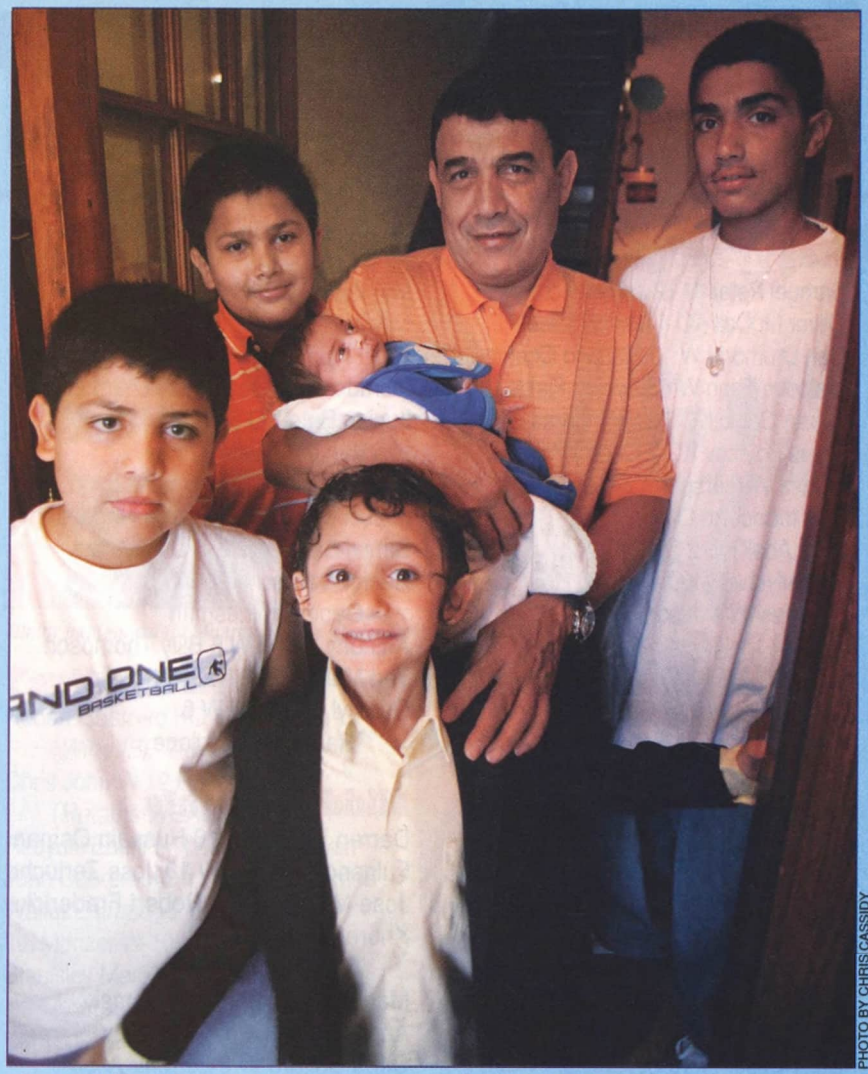

PHOTO BY CHRIS CASSIDY

Hamsho and his five sons, baby Fouzi, Youssef (with his father's hand on his shoulder), Mohamed (to the left of Youssef), Ahmed (behind Mohamed), and Mustafa, the eldest at age 15.

None of that is part of Hamsho's life. He is proud of his heritage, but also proud of what he became in America. When Hamsho arrived here, he captured the American dream and it made him famous and provided him with a comfortable life. In addition to his daughter, Suzanne, he and his wife, Kulaud, are raising six children in Brooklyn—Fouzi, Mahmud, Ahmed, Mohamed, Youssef, and Mustafa—who range in age from 14 years to two months.

Hamsho spends his time helping out at his brother's Manhattan restaurant, Raffles, and working with young Arab fighters, including middleweight Mohammad Said. Even though the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks has just passed, it remains tangible in his everyday life. Recently, he and his brother were pulled over and questioned by police late one night after leaving the restaurant.

"As long as there is fighting in the Middle East, it's not helping us as Arabs here," he said.

He cringes when reminded that boxer Tony Mundine, a convert to Islam, said that the United States brought the attacks upon itself.

"When you look at it, it was wrong," Hamsho said of 9/11. "It killed me to see that. Why did anybody have to die? For what reason? I have traveled all around the world and when I come back to New York, I am home. This is my children's home. I have spent more time in New York City than any place in the world. This is my home." ■

Robert Cassidy is a former associate editor of this magazine and a regular contributor.

[Summary]

Heavyweights

Samuel Peter W 12 James Toney
Oliver McCall KO 4 Darroll Wilson
Carl Drumond W 10 Mariano Ocampo
Malcolm Tann W 6 Sedreck Fields
Goran Gogic KO 2 Zoltan Beres
Denis Boytsov KO 2 Ondrej Pala
Chazz Witherspoon KO 2
Innocent Otukuwu
Joey Abell KO 2 David Cleage
Matt Mychajliv KO 1 Harold Rodriguez
Joe Mesi W 4 Jason Weiss

Cruiserweights

Mike Cooper KO 2 Gary Culp
Simon Carr KO 1 Robert Irizarry
Bobby Gunn KO 7 Shannon Landberg
Tavoris Cloud KO 4 Tim Shocks
Shaun George W 8 John Douglas

Light Heavyweights

Clinton Woods W 12 Glen Johnson
(*Retains IBF Title*)
Danny Green KO 9 Jason DeLisle
Massimiliano Saiani W 12 Istvan Varga
Berry Butler W 10 Corey Cummings
Adrian Diaconu W 10 Olando Rivera
Max Alexander W 8 Tyrone Glover

Super Middleweights

Librado Andrade KO 1 Richard Grant
Lucian Bute KO 8
James Obede Toney
Allan Green W 10 Emmett Linton
Jozsef Nagy W 12 Darren Rhodes
Dimitri Sartison KO 5 David Paul
Hector Camacho Jr. KO 3
George Klinesmith
Anthony Dirrell W 6 Billy Thompson
Ted Muller KO 2 Nathan Martin
Gusmyl Perdomo W 8
`Ramdane Serdjane

Middleweights

Darren Barker W 10 Hussain Osman
Fulgencio Zuniga W 10 Jose Zertuche
Jose Medina KO 6 Robert Fredericks
Khoren Gevor KO 3
Andile Tshongolo
Mahir Oral KO 1 Dirk Dzemski
Andy Lee KO 1 Jess Salway
Chris Collard W 8 Jeremy Allen

Junior Middleweights

Laszlo Buranyi W 10 Janos Petrovics
Jason Papillion W 10 Bernard Harris
Masato Arai Tech. Draw 8 Luiz Okamoto
Ahmed Kaddour D 8 Jesus Valverde
Daniel Edouard KO 1 Jairo Jesus Siris
Archak TerMeliksetian KO 4
Dillon Carew
Ian MacKillop W 6 Yan Lecavalier
Steve Forbes W 5 Cornelius Bundrage
Grady Brewer W 5 Norberto Bravo
Cornelius Bundrage W 5 Walter Wright
Norberto Bravo W 5 Gary Balletto
Grady Brewer W 5 Michael Stewart
Taro Tokunaga KO 1 Kiyotaka Hara
Harry Yorgey W 6 David Toribio
Omar Weis W 6 Sergio Finetto

Welterweights

Miguel Angel Gonzalez W 12
Alejandro Garcia
David Estrada KO 7 Clarence Taylor
Robert Medley W 10 Nonoy Gonzales
Dmitriy Salita W 10 Francisco Campos
Edgar Santana W 10
Vladimir Khodokovski

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Junior welterweight Paez Jr. rips Campos with a left

Teruyoshi Omagari KO 9 Keiichi Arai
Taisei Marumoto KO 7
Hiroshi Yamaguchi
Henry Crawford KO 1 Adam Wynant
Jamar Patterson KO 2 Charles Wade
Luis Carlos Abregu KO 6 Rodrigo Pias

Junior Welterweights

Souleymane M'baye KO 4 Raul Balbi
(*Wins Vacant WBA Title*)
Junior Witter W 12 DeMarcus Corley
(*Wins Vacant WBC Title*)
Emanuel Augustus KO 8
Courtney Burton
Amir Kahn KO 1 Ryan Barrett
Luciano Silva W 12
Arturo Rolando Gerez
Kenryo Matsumoto W 10
Hidekazu Matsunobu
Lamont Peterson KO 6 Omar Bernal
Steve Upsher KO 3 Reggie Nash
Mike Post KO 2 Brian Paul
Freddy Chura W 8 Valery Kharyanov
Daudy Bahari W 8 Petch Windy Sport
Norihito Nakamura W 8
Tomoyuki Shiotani
Jorge Paez Jr. W 4 Derrick Campos

Lightweights

Kengo Nagashima W 10 Kazuki Kubota
Almazbek Raiymkulov KO 7
Jairo Ramirez
Akio Mikami KO 6
Denchai Sor Tiebkoon
Roberto Tamayo KO 5
Cayetano Romero
Allan Luxford KO 1 Theophilus Quaye
Mirai Ishigaki KO 4
Nannam Kiatprasanchai
Noe Bolanos Tech. Draw 5
Jose Hernandez
Anthony Peterson W 6
Armando Cordoba

Junior Lightweights

Marco Antonio Barrera W 12
Rocky Juarez
(*Retains WBC Title*)
Joan Guzman W 12 Jorge Barrios
John Murray W 10 Moebi Sarouna
Lazaro de Jesus W 10
Marcos Da Silva
Daniel Attah W 8 Alejandro Ramirez
Takashi Uchiyama W 8 Tomoya Endo
Edinson Garcia W Disq. 5 Likar Ramos
Satoshi Hosono KO 1 Jeffrey Onate

PHOTO BY TORU YAMANAKA/GETTY IMAGES

Junior bantamweight Mijares attacks Kawashima's body

Featherweights

Robert Guerrero KO 8 Eric Aiken
(*Wins IBF Title*)
Chris John W 12 Renan Acosta
(*Retains WBA Title*)
Hiroyuki Enoki W 12 Nedal Hussein
Juan Cabrera KO 11 Gerardo Ramon
Walter Estrada W 10 Dunis Linan
Ina Menzer W 10 Leli Luz Florez
Stanislav Merdov KO 11
Andras Meszaros
Kei Tsukaguchi Tech. Draw 2
Wayu Windygym
Gary Stark W 8 Carlos Diaz
Zaiki Takemoto W 10 Alex Escaner
Seishiro Tashiro KO 4
Naphdetsh Soonkilanoynai
Tsukasa Sano KO 1 Isshin Sasaki
Leonilo Miranda KO 1 Abel Berrelleza
Tatsuya Tsubouchi KO 8 Sunao Uno

Junior Featherweight

Israel Vazquez KO 10 Jhonny Gonzalez
(*Retains World Championship*)
Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym KO 2
Jonathan Baat
Rolly Matsushita KO 1 Billy Wuwungan
Jose Tula KO 1 Pedro Alejandro
Andres Cabrera KO 10 Gabriel Perez
Yuta Nagai KO 6 Shintaro Naka
Jonathan Oquendo W 8
Paulino Villalobos

Bantamweights

Anselmo Moreno W 10 Franklin Varela
Alex Baba W 10 Jose German Cruz
Timur Shailezov W 10 Pavel Kubasov
Alejandro Perez KO 4 Robert DaLuz
Kenichi Yamaguchi W 8 Hiroki Kojima
Abner Mares W 8 Kevin Hudgins

Junior Bantamweights

Cristian Mijares W 12
Katsushige Kawashima
Chatchai Sasakul W 12 Yuki Murai
Jung Oh Son W 10 Hiroshi Yoshiyama
Tomonobu Shimizu KO 4
Vinai Wor Surapol

Flyweights

Rodel Mayol KO 1 Masatsugu Okada
Edgar Sosa Tech. Win 10
Noel Arambulet
Junichi Ebisuoka W 10 Pingping Tepura
Susianna Kentikian KO 4 Maribel Zurita
Yasushi Matsushita KO 2
Manachai Sithsaithong
Alfred Nagal KO 2 Shippu Akihiro
Regina Halmich KO 6 Ria Ramnarine

Junior Flyweights

Daniel Reyes W 8 Nelson Cantero
Along Denoy Tech. Draw 5
Sonny Boy Jaro
Cesar Canchila KO 7
Juan Carlos Castillo
Erik Ramirez KO 1 Sergio Diaz

Strawweights

Kazuma Kumada W 10
Hiroshi Matsumoto
Florante Condes KO 4 Fabio Marfa
Akira Yaegashi KO 1
Liempetch Sor Veerapol

Israel Vazquez KO 10 Jhonny Gonzalez

Las Vegas, Nevada: Bantamweight beltholder Gonzalez was taking a step up in weight to super bantam to challenge RING champion Vazquez, and it looked like a good move on his part during the first six rounds, as he put Vazquez on the floor twice. But Vazquez showed tremendous heart, turned the fight around, and gained the stoppage win in round 10 to record his second defense of the title he won in December '05 against Oscar Larios. "I nailed him with a nice right hand," Vazquez said of the seventh-round punch that turned the fight around. "[After that] I started pushing it even more."

Gonzalez, 121, Mexico City, Mexico began the fight at the MGM Grand moving around the ring with his hands held high and using his height advantage to keep the shorter Vazquez, 122, West Covina, California, via Mexico City, at bay. Vazquez, 28, was trying to get in close to use his strength, and he had some success in the first round, but over the next five, Gonzalez, 25, took control and was catching Vazquez coming in with left jabs followed by left hooks. It didn't take long for those jabs and hooks to cause the champion's eyes to begin to swell.

In round four, Gonzalez threw a long looping left hook that came around his opponent's low right hand and caught him flush on the chin. Vazquez went down, and when he got to his feet, Gonzalez jumped straight back in, going for the finish. But Vazquez had recovered and hit him back with a solid right to the face.

Though Gonzalez appeared to have solid control of the fight, there was a lot of blood coming from his nose and it didn't stop flowing.

In the sixth, the challenger landed a few straight rights to the head of Vazquez and then another long left hook that caught him on the chin and sent him down for the second time. This was a better knockdown than the first, and Vazquez looked as though he was in serious trouble. But he got back up again and was able to finish the round.

Gonzalez came out in round seven picking Vazquez off. But at the same time, he left himself open for a straight, short right from Vazquez, and when it landed, he fell to the canvas, to the shock of those who thought he had the fight wrapped up already. When Gonzalez got up, his face was covered in blood. He came back in the eighth and fought well, but just like in the previous round, he was moving to his left, onto his opponent's right hand.

It was clear when Gonzalez began the 10th that he was having trouble dealing with the strength of Vazquez' shots. He tried to move around, but Vazquez, 41-3 (30), was now able to get in close. He landed a left hook and a right hand to Gonzalez' head, sending him down once again, and it appeared that Gonzalez was done. Certainly, his lead trainer, Oscar Suarez, thought so, since he was standing on the ring apron waving the towel to save his fighter from any more punishment. Seeing Suarez signaling the surrender, referee Kenny Bayless (USA) stopped the fight at 2:09 of the 10th round.

"I dropped my left and didn't take care of myself," Gonzalez, 33-5 (28), said. "I left myself open to Vazquez' right. I'm surprised by the outcome."

At the time of the stoppage, Gonzalez was ahead on all three scorecards.

Television: **HBO Pay-Per-View**
Promoters: **Golden Boy Promotions, Main Events, Sycuan Ringside Promotions**
(9-16-06)
Wayne McCullough

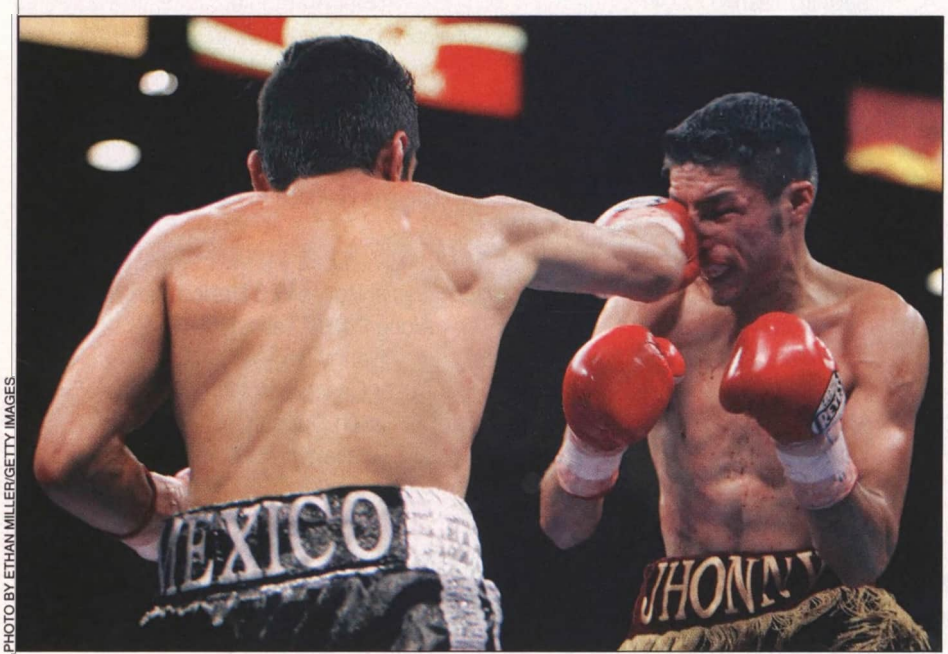

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Vazquez drives a right into Gonzalez' nose

Joan Guzman W 12 Jorge Barrios

Las Vegas, Nevada: The fight between Barrios and Guzman on the Barrera-Juarez II undercard at the MGM Grand almost fell through at the scales when Barrios came in 1½ pounds overweight for a defense of his 130-pound belt. Luckily for the fans, Guzman agreed to go ahead with the fight, and it turned out to be an entertaining scrap. Had Barrios won the fight, the belt would have become vacant. Only Guzman was eligible

to win the title, and that's precisely what he did, as he danced around the ring using superior skills to pull out a decision and claim the WBO strap.

Typically, Guzman, 129, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, is the one with weight problems, but this time he seemed to make weight easily and looked strong. He walked straight out in the opening round and caught the aggressive Barrios, 131½, Buenos Aires, Argentina, with a left uppercut to the head, rocking him. Guzman was explosive and wanted to finish the fight early, but Barrios stayed in there with him.

A former beltholder at 122 pounds, Guzman strangely appeared the naturally stronger of the two. He controlled most of the first six rounds using his left jab to set up overhand rights to his opponent's head. Barrios, 30, caught Guzman, also 30, with a few solid right hands to the head along the way, but nothing that really hurt him.

Some of the rounds were close and hard to score, but Guzman was the one dominating the pace. He would start fast for about 30 seconds of each round and then he would begin to move around, letting Barrios come forward attempting to land shots. Guzman has a superb defense, and even though he carries his left hand low, his right hand covers his chin. His body movement, which he uses to avoid shots, is precise.

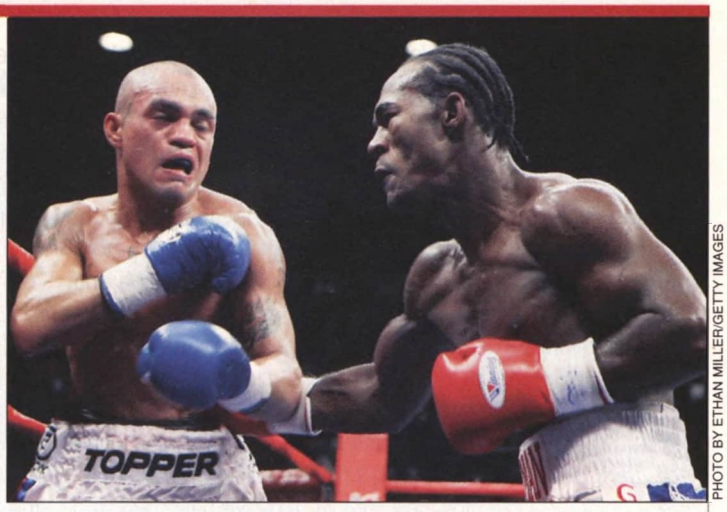

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Guzman digs to Barrios' body during entertaining scrap

The Ring Fighter of the Month

Presented by EVERLAST EST.1910

Israel Vazquez

Israel Vazquez has a reputation for working as hard in the gym as any fighter. You can tell from his physique that he never skips a sit-up, never slows down to a walk for the last couple of blocks of his roadwork. And it's a darned good thing he trains so hard, because as his trainer, Freddie Roach, said after his miraculous come-from-behind win over Jhonny Gonzalez, Vazquez' conditioning was the only thing keeping him in the fight at the end of six rounds.

The junior featherweight world champ had arguably lost every round and had been knocked down twice, but he refused to cave, and he rallied to knock Gonzalez down in the seventh before stopping him in round 10 complete the comeback. Conditioning was key. But so were mental toughness and heart. Vazquez has plenty of all of those attributes, and though nobody ever said being world champion is easy, "El Magnifico" has what it takes to get through the difficult challenges that lurk around every corner.

Against Gonzalez, he didn't turn in his most flawless performance, and he didn't *box* especially well. But he did *fight* brilliantly. And that allowed him to retain his title, and claim the title of Fighter of the Month.

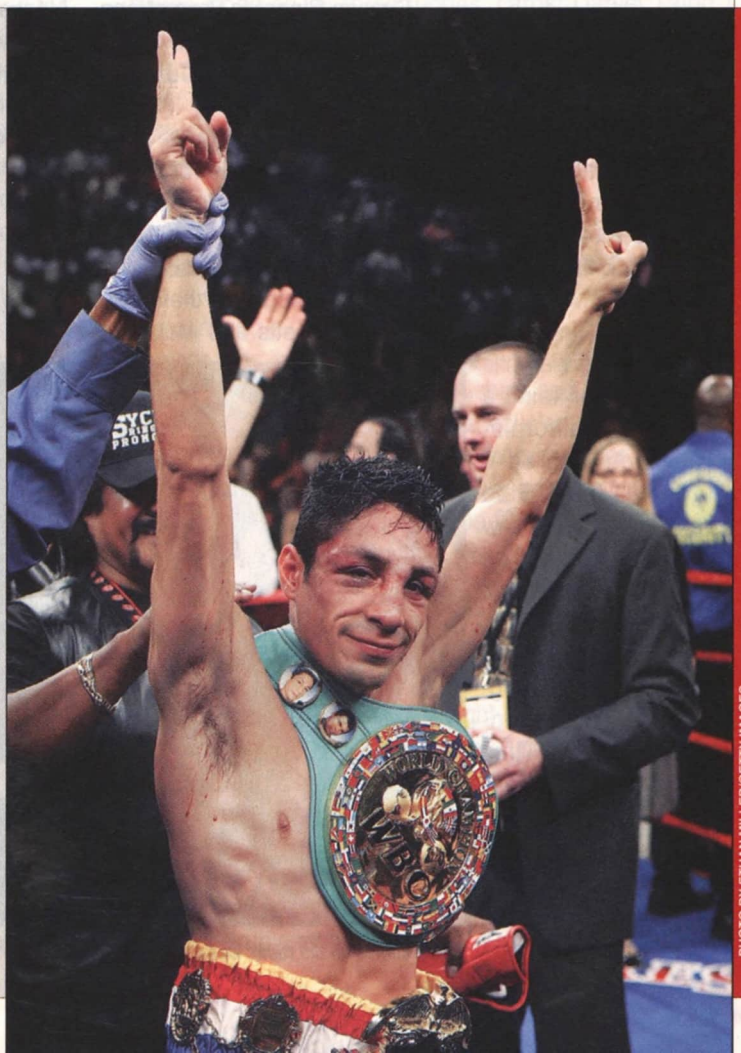

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Barrios was warned for low blows in the first part of the bout and the referee, Vic Drakulich (USA), finally deducted a point from him in the sixth.

During the second half of the fight, Barrios was pushing forward. He pinned Guzman on the ropes on occasion and unloaded punches to the head and body, but Guzman caught most of them on his arms, shoulders, and gloves. The final four rounds went back and forth, with Guzman tiring near the end and punching with less frequency. Barrios, 46-3-1 (33), was forcing the fight and trying to come from behind for the win.

And "The Hyena" nearly pulled it off. Guzman was awarded a split decision victory on close scores of 115-112 (William Lerch) and 114-113 (Carol Castellano), with one dissenting vote from Bill Graham of 114-113 for Barrios. If Barrios hadn't lost a point for a low blow, the fight would have been declared a draw. THE RING scored it 114-113 for Guzman.

Guzman, 26-0 (17), said, "I didn't think it was that close, but I'll take the win anyway. I was trying to stick to my game plan most of the time, which was to fight him at a distance. I could tell he wasn't used to that and I knew he was in trouble."

Barrios admitted, "Guzman's power surprised me, but I didn't think his performance was enough to win. I felt I won. I didn't feel making weight or trying to make weight affected my performance."

Television: **HBO Pay-Per-View**
Promoters: **Golden Boy Promotions, Main Events, Sycuan Ringside Promotions**
(9-16-06)
Wayne McCullough

Samuel Peter W 12 James Toney

Los Angeles, California: A fan's fight with no world titles at stake, the event drew 9,852 customers into Staples Center, and it seemed like at least 9,000 of them scored for Toney, the only American around these days who could conceivably grab the vacant RING championship. But he won't get there with judges like Dick Flaherty of Massachusetts and Alejandro Rochin, a Mexican official who maintains a home in California. They both scored it 116-111 Peter. Gale Van Hoy of Texas saw it 115-112 Toney, as did THE RING. Most fight writers in attendance scored it for Toney.

With a sharp, stinging jab, Toney controlled much of this remarkably action-packed contest between two portly but dangerous contenders. But he couldn't muster the power to place "The Nigerian Nightmare" in serious jeopardy. Toney's hooks and straight rights out of nowhere also busted up Peter, but without really hurting him. The determined Peter managed to put "Lights Out" on Queer Street on at least a couple of occasions with wild barrages loaded with bad intentions. Plenty of Peter's overhand rights landed in the vicinity of the back of the neck and head. Some of this could be attributed to the wily motions of Toney. Referee Raul Caiz Sr. (USA) had his hands full in this one, but he should have done more to control the action and cut the number of deadly shots slamming Toney behind the head. It made scoring tougher because illegal shots set up legal punches.

Toney, who weighed in at a hefty 233, relied more on movement from the waist than the feet. He also worked well off the ropes, frustrating the offense-minded Peter with tricky counterpunches and deft head movement. His conditioning was superior to that of Peter, who, at 257 pounds, also carried plenty of excess flesh. But after breathing through an open mouth in the middle rounds, Peter, 26, Akwaibom, Nigeria, mustered more offense in round 12 than Toney, 69-5-3 (43) with 1 no-contest. Peter, 27-1 (22), managed to steal some rounds in the final seconds. But this was offset to an extent by a point he lost in round nine for clubbing Toney, Sherman Oaks, California, on both ears simultaneously after Caiz Sr. had called for a break.

The winner was supposed to get a shot at Oleg Maskaev's alphabet title, and if the victorious Peter keeps improving his conditioning and learns to insert more technique into his strategy, he could achieve plenty, especially when referees don't enforce the rules. Meanwhile, it's a setback for Toney, and, at 38, you have to wonder how much longer can he do this?

Television: **Showtime**
Promoters: **Goossen-Tutor Promotions, Don King Productions, Duva Boxing**
(9-2-06)
Ivan Goldman

PHOTO BY DONALD MIRALLE/GETTY IMAGES

Toney comes off the ropes with a counter right

Robert Guerrero KO 8 Eric Aiken

Los Angeles, California: With Marco Antonio Barrera, Erik Morales, and Manny Pacquiao all having moved up to junior lightweight, the featherweight division, a traditional repository of exciting contests, needs to develop more big names. One of them could be Guerrero of Gilroy, California, who dominated unlikely IBF titlist Aiken in the co-feature of the card headed by James Toney and Samuel Peter at Staples Center.

PHOTO BYDONALD MIRALLE/GETTY IMAGES

Aiken takes one flush from Guerrero

Guerrero, 23, pressured Aiken from the opening bell, slipping, sliding, and throwing varied combinations that prevented him from getting off. Aiken scored a pair of huge upsets earlier this year, knocking out Tim Austin and then defeating Valdemir Pereira for his alphabet strap, but he couldn't keep the momentum going in his first defense. Between judges Steve English, Raul Caiz Jr., and Lou Moret, all of California, only one round on one card was scored for Aiken. Whenever southpaw Guerrero, 19-1-1 (12), did get caught with a punch, he shrugged it off and kept coming, discouraging Aiken even more.

Every time Aiken, 26, tried to come out strong at the bell, Guerrero either counterpunched him on the spot or weathered the storm and tamed him. When they went toe-to-toe, Guerrero, 124½, was more effective. The challenger won the conditioning contest and imposed a will that was just too strong for the dispirited, fading Aiken, 125, Washington, D.C., whose record sank to 16-5 (12).

By round eight, with Aiken finding more difficulty evading Guerrero's punishing shots, referee Tony Crebs penalized him a point for holding. When the round ended, Aiken returned to his stool with discouragement all over his face. His left eye had been closing since the middle rounds and he said he hurt his right hand in the second round. The corner wisely decided to let their fighter compete another day.

Television: **Showtime**
Promoters: **Goossen-Tutor Promotions, Don King Productions, Banner Promotions**
(9-2-06)
Ivan Goldman

Koki Kameda W 12 Juan Landaeta

Yokohama, Japan: Unbeaten 19-year-old Japanese southpaw Kameda, 108, acquired the vacant WBA light flyweight belt as he came off the canvas in the first round, maintained his aggressiveness from the second on, and pounded out a hard-fought split decision over Venezuelan veteran Landaeta, 107¾, over 12 hot rounds in front of 15,000 fans.

It was close on all three judges' cards: Daniel Talon (France) saw it 114-113 for Kameda, Kwangsoo Kim (Korea) had it 115-113 for Kameda, and Gustavo Padilla (Panama) scored it 115-112 for Landaeta. It was a very good give-and-take affair between the southpaws.

Kameda got off to a good start by landing at close range, but the 27-year-old Venezuelan connected with a southpaw right hook in the closing seconds of round one, dropping the Japanese prospect to the deck. Kameda managed to pull himself up and resumed fighting on rubbery legs until the bell came to his rescue.

Kameda was in command in the second and third, as he kept going forward to land solid bodyshots and good straight lefts to the face of the handsome Venezuelan. In the fourth, Landaeta shook him up with a barrage of punches, though Kameda also had his moments, making good use of right jabs.

The sensational youngster took the fifth through eighth as he utilized right leads and one-two combinations. Still, Landaeta was keeping the rounds close. A legal punch in the sixth caused a cut over Kameda's right eyebrow, and the seventh saw Landaeta rock him with a southpaw one-two to the face.

Kameda kept attacking with straight lefts in the ninth, but Landaeta turned loose and displayed his furious retaliation with busy combinations. In the 10th, Kameda fought back hard with versatile right leads and kept going forward to hurt the Venezuelan.

In round 11, Landaeta caught Kameda with a flurry of punches, and the Japanese fighter desperately grabbed the Venezuelan to overcome the crisis. Kameda was fatiguing

badly from the punishment and the fast pace, and it looked for a moment like he wouldn't make it out of the round. But he willed himself through to the bell.

The Venezuelan also dominated the 12th and final session, when Kameda looked too tired and slow to attack. Landaeta had a good chance to finish Kameda, but he was also fading and failed to get the job done.

It was a close affair, with Landaeta, 20-4-1 (16), scoring the knockdown in the first and obviously dominating the last two rounds, whereas Kameda was in command in most of the middle sessions. Some people jeered the decision because they thought Landaeta's combinations were more effective, but others favored Kameda's continual aggression.

It was a remarkable achievement that the 19-year-old kid won an alphabet belt in his 12th pro bout, following in the footsteps of Fighting Harada and Hiroki Ioka, both of whom won titles prior to their 20th birthdays. Kameda, 12-0 (10), will soon move up to the flyweight class, but he will defend this crown once or twice first. The first defense will be a rematch with Landaeta in Tokyo.

Promoters: **Kyoei Promotions, Teiken Promotions**

(8-2-06)

Joe Koizumi

PHOTO BY KOICHI KAMOSHIDA/GETTY IMAGES

Kameda wings a wide right at Landaeta

Evander Holyfield KO 2 Jeremy Bates

Dallas, Texas: Looking to snap a three-fight losing skid and return from a 21-month layoff at the age of 43, living legend Holyfield did the wise thing when it came time to choose an opponent: He found a limited, stationary clubfighter on a two-fight losing streak of his own. The result was not only an end to Holyfield's four-year winless run, but also an aesthetically pleasing performance that spelled the end of a nine-year, 10-fight stretch without a knockout.

Holyfield, 220, Atlanta, Georgia, instantly looked like a different fighter than he had in his horrid previous showing against Larry Donald, getting up on his toes and catching insurance salesman Bates, 225½, Charleston, West Virginia, with punches in combination during the first minute of the fight. The 32-year-old Bates was game, attempting heavy blows, but most of them missed and left him open for Holyfield's technically superior punches. With the crowd of about 10,000 at the American Airlines Center roaring, "The Real Deal" hurt Bates late in the first round and followed up with a barrage along the ropes. Referee Rafael Ramos (USA) wouldn't have been heavily criticized if he'd stopped the fight at that point, but he allowed Bates to hear the bell ending the round.

In the second, Holyfield again started well, but Bates, 21-12-1 (18), did make it an interesting about a minute in, connecting with a flush right hand to the jaw that stunned Holyfield for just a moment. The former heavyweight and cruiserweight champion quickly shook it off, however,

PHOTO BY LAYNE MURDOCH/GETTY IMAGES

Holyfield hammers Bates with a right en route to easy TKO

and went back on the attack, again pinning "The Beast" along the ropes. There, Holyfield found the perfect angle to crash right hand after right hand against Bates' skull, finally prompting Ramos to step in and save the overmatched underdog at 2:56 of the round.

Holyfield, 39-8-2 (26), was asked afterward if he felt he'd turned back the clock, and the determined warrior insisted that the clock "never turned." We'll find out about that in November when he takes on Fres Oquendo, an opponent whom many suspect is every bit as wrong for Holyfield as Bates was right for him.

Television: **Fox Sports Net**
Promoter: **Real Deal Events**
(8-18-06)

PHOTO BY ADEK BERRY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

John rocks Panama's Acosta with a left

Sergio Mora W 10 Eric Regan

Sacramento, California: The importance of the Mora-Regan fight at Arco Arena diminished significantly when, in the days leading up to it, it became apparent that a talked-about middleweight championship fight against Jermain Taylor was not awaiting Mora if he got past Regan. But it was still a serious test for the *Contender* Season One winner and a great opportunity to prove to skeptics that he's more than just a reality-TV creation. Which is precisely what he did in outboxing fringe contender Regan over 10 rounds.

The biggest challenge for Mora, 159, Los Angeles, California, was in figuring out how to cope with Regan's height. At 6'4", the Roseville, California, fighter is a truly freakishly built middleweight, towering over the 6' Mora. But "The Latin Snake" had just enough speed and sneaky moves to throw and land the punches he needed to.

Mora, 25, got inside early in the first round—partially because Regan, 160, doesn't make enough use of his jab—and landed an excellent left hook to the body. To close out the round, Mora ducked under a wild roundhouse shot from the 30-year-old Regan and unleashed a nine-punch flurry, including two excellent rights to the chin.

Mora controlled the second round as well, but Regan started to get some business done in the third, driving Mora backward with a counter left hook. Still, far too much of the fight was being waged at close quarters, where Mora's faster hands were piling up the points. They were also earning him a few warnings from referee Jon Schorle (USA) for hitting on the break, but he never did lose a point for it.

The Latin Snake had an excellent moment early in the fifth when he momentarily buckled Regan's legs with a left hook to the jaw, prompting the beanpole opponent to clinch. Mora's confidence seemed to grow after this, and he found himself showing off shifty moves, punching from unexpected angles, and switching to southpaw periodically for the remainder of the fight. He also hammered away with regularity at Regan's ribs, doing notable damage to the midsection in round seven.

Mora stunned Regan again in the eighth with a right cross. It was clear going into the last two rounds that Regan, 26-3 (17), needed to make something dramatic happen, but it wasn't to be, as he could never quite figure out Mora, 19-0 (4), and ended up losing the last two rounds clearly. When the scorecards were added up, Steve English and Ralph McKnight both had Mora on top, 97-93, and Steve Morrow scored it 98-92, the same as THE RING.

It's probably a good thing for Mora that the Taylor fight isn't happening immediately, as he isn't ready—and may never be ready—to beat an opponent of that stature. But in the meantime, he's doing a fine job of building his way up to it by beating credible opponents like Regan.

Television: **ESPN2**
Promoter: **Don Chargin Promotions**
(8-25-06)

Chris John W 12 Renan Acosta

Jakarta, Indonesia: Surprisingly, what was expected to be a tactical fight between two relatively light hitters at Soemantri Brodjonegoro Hall turned out to be an action-packed offensive battle. Not surprisingly, undefeated WBA featherweight titleholder John won by a wide margin against Acosta, who was somehow rated in the WBA's top 10 despite losing two of his last four fights.

John, 124½, Indonesia, went on the attack right from the opening bell, but Acosta, 125, Panama, stood his ground and traded with the beltholder. One particularly noteworthy straight right hand to the head by John edged the intense round. But Acosta took the second stanza, thanks to a counter shot that stagered the local fighter.

There wasn't another round after that, however, that the challenger did enough to win. "Bam Bam" focused on John's ribs and did some decent work over the next few rounds, but John's headshots were much more noteworthy. The sixth was a particularly good round for John, 26, as he hurt the Panamanian with a right cross. The titlist turned up the heat in the seventh, chasing his tiring opponent all around the ring.

Acosta, 24, fell even farther behind in the eighth when referee Derek Milham (Australia) took a point from him for a low blow—and it also didn't help the challenger's cause to get rocked by four consecutive left hooks from "The Dragon." Acosta, 18-5 (5), refused to give in, but he was weary and overmatched, and it was all he could do to roll with punches and survive the final four rounds. John, meanwhile, kept trying for the knockout throughout the 12th, but it wasn't to be. Judge Raul Caiz Jr. scored it 119-108, Takeo Harada (Japan) had it 120-107, and Ferdinand Estrella (Spain) tabbed it 120-109.

"I landed my best shots, but I must praise Acosta in that he's very, very tough," said John, 38-0-1 (20),

Promoter: **Kalea Boxing Promotions**

(9-9-06)

PHOTO BY CHAD LUNDQUIST

Southpaw Williams spears Mitchell with a right

Paul Williams KO 4 Sharmba Mitchell

Reno, Nevada: There are still several questions about Williams: Does he have a 79-inch reach, or is it 82 inches? Is he 6'1", or 6'2"? Did he really kayo Antonio Margarito during a sparring session?

While those questions may always be debated (though you'd think a simple tape measure could solve the first two), what won't be debated is that the 25-year-old Williams, 146½, Aiken, South Carolina, knocked down two-time former junior welterweight beltholder Mitchell, 146½, four times en route to a fourth-round knockout in front of approximately 2,000 fans at Reno Events Center.

Whatever his true physical dimensions are, Williams, 31-0 (23), lived up to his nickname "The Punisher" and battered the 5'7", 35-year-old Mitchell, 57-6 (30), of Washington, D.C., from the outside and from the inside.

The end came at 2:57 of round four after the freakishly rangy Williams put down Mitchell for the third time in the round. Referee Vic Drakulich (USA) reached the count of 10 as Mitchell got up, but his corner was already in the ring to prevent further punishment.

"That's not even the tip of the iceberg," Williams said of his impressive performance. "No, sir. If he would've come out with some sweet stuff, my skill level could've jumped to another level."

For Williams the win was part Sweet Science—he used a long right jab, right hook, and left cross from the outside—and part street mugging, as he pummeled the outgunned Mitchell with uppercuts in close, even while the pair of southpaws were tied up.

"He locked up my arms," said the vanquished Mitchell, who earned $50,000 in the loss. "I couldn't get my punches off, but he could still whip punches. I don't take anything from him."

Mitchell, normally a smooth stylist, immediately took the fight to the much taller Williams, getting in close to try to negate his opponent's range. But Williams, who took home $60,000, stunned Mitchell with right hook-left cross combo in the middle of round one.

Mitchell rallied briefly in the second, landing his own right-left, followed by a pair of hard right hooks, but Williams' chin remained undented. Williams dominated at the end of the round and, early in the third frame, dropped Mitchell with a left uppercut-right-left combo. Mitchell was up at two, but his heart only prolonged the inevitable.

A left-right floored Mitchell in the fourth, as did a right hook-left uppercut a minute later. The end came after Williams followed up a brutal flurry with another left-right to put "The Little Big Man" down for the fourth and final time.

With the wingspan of a heavyweight, the shoulders of a middleweight, and the waist of a featherweight, Williams presents an imposing challenge for any welterweight. Williams' promoter, Dan Goossen, said his fighter would get the winner of the Margarito-Joshua Clottey fight,

scheduled for December 2, within 120 days of the match.

While Goossen said Williams would remain active, Mitchell said he is considering retiring to manage a group of Washington, D.C.-area based fighters, including heavyweight Tony "The Tiger" Thompson.

Television: **HBO**
Promoter: **Goossen-Tutor Promotions**
(8-19-06)
Mike Houser

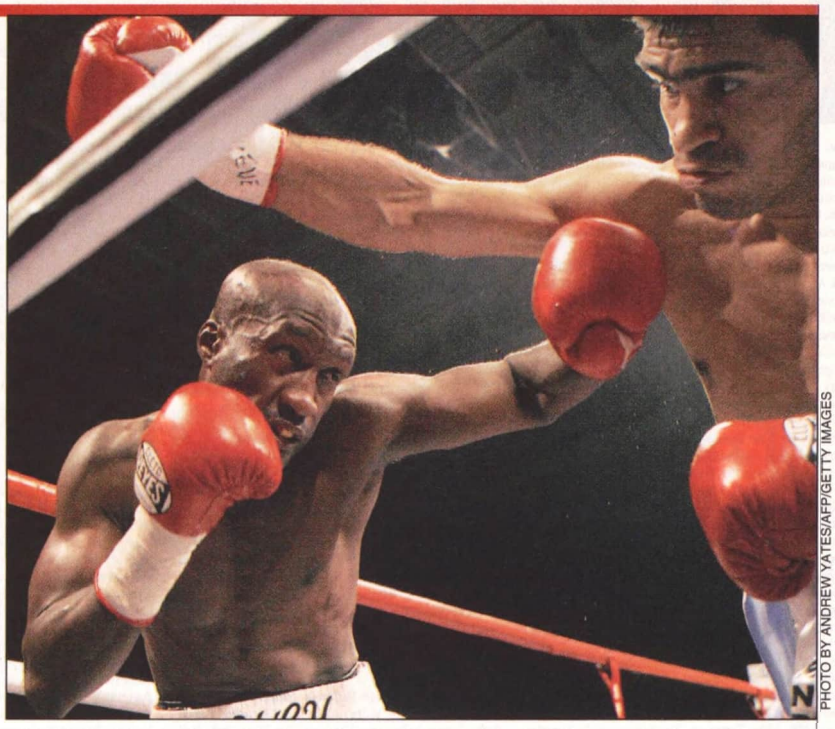

PHOTO BY ANDREW YATES/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Mbaye swaps leather with Balbi en route to fourth-round TKO

Souleymane Mbaye KO 4
Raul Balbi

Bolton, England: With Ricky Hatton—the linear world junior welterweight champion and the only one recognized by THE RING—in the building to support Clinton Woods against Glen Johnson in the main event, Mbaye, 139½, Paris, France, had the perfect opportunity to make a statement. "The Hitman" had moved up to welterweight rather than face the Frenchman, who was his mandatory challenger for the WBA 140-pound belt. But in seizing the vacant title by fourth-round stoppage over the faded Balbi, 140, Buenos Aires, Argentina, at the Bolton Arena, Mbaye betrayed vulnerabilities that Hatton would have exploited lustily.

What made for a thrilling spectacle in front of 5,000 raucous fans would not make for comfortable viewing when the 31-year-old Parisian sits down to review the tape. In the opening round he was staggered early by two left hooks and a right to the jaw and was subjected to a ferocious assault for almost the whole of the round. Balbi, a former WBA lightweight titleholder, aggressive like Hatton but not anywhere near as strong at the weight, had Mbaye on a plate. He was unable to set his right leg, which shook like jelly, and could not fire anything back amid the maelstrom of violence that gave the rugged Argentine a clear 10-8 round.

The minute's rest was a lifeline. In the second round, Mbaye took another left hook early, but showed greater resistance. Then he connected with a left hook and just missed Balbi's whiskers with a left-right combination. Suddenly, he looked strong and dangerous, reminiscent of a fighter whose sole previous loss had been on points against Vivian Harris for the same title. Mbaye, 35-1 (20), had found his range and he floored Balbi, 54-8-1 (37), with a pinpoint overhand right to the chin. Balbi beat the count of British referee Paul Thomas, but took another right cross at the bell.

The slugfest continued into the third, but Balbi never presented the same danger as he had in the one-sided opening round. Mbaye increasingly imposed his authority despite Balbi's determination not to take a backward step. In the fourth, the game Argentine walked into a powerful straight right that sent him face-first to the floor. He was clearly in trouble, struggling to clear his head and regain control of his legs during the mandatory eight-count, and a sustained attack by Mbaye, including hooks from both hands and one searing right uppercut, persuaded Thomas to rescue Balbi at the 2:14 mark. His intervention was perfectly timed, despite the protests from the Argentine's corner.

Hatton's decision to vacate the WBA welterweight title he won from Luis Collazo means he will concentrate again on this division. Based on this fight, he will almost certainly look forward to locking horns with Mbaye.

Promoter: **Sports Network**
(9-2-06)
Brian Doogan

David Diaz KO 10
Jose Armando Santa Cruz

Las Vegas, Nevada: Every fight is for some kind of a belt these days, and in this bout on the Oleg Maskaev-Hasim Rahman undercard at the Thomas & Mack Center, Santa Cruz was defending the WBC "interim" lightweight belt against Diaz. What did that mean? It meant that the winner would be in line for a shot at Diego Corrales next year. That's fairly ridiculous, considering how far in over their heads both of these fighters would be against Corrales. But against each other, they were in just deep enough to make it entertaining, and Santa Cruz built a solid lead before losing via dramatic come-from-behind kayo in round 10.

1996 U.S. Olympian Diaz, 134½, Chicago, Illinois, started off well, using his southpaw right jab to catch his taller opponent as he came forward. Despite boasting a three-inch height advantage and a four-inch reach advantage, Santa Cruz, 134½, Lincoln Heights, California, refused to use either to his benefit as he fought in a very low position, keeping his hands close to his body. Diaz, meanwhile, succeeded in getting close and landing quick left uppercuts to his opponent's chin.

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But in the fourth, Santa Cruz, 25, who normally fights from an orthodox stance, switched to southpaw and started having some success. He landed double right jabs and then straight lefts to Diaz' head. In the middle rounds, Diaz could do nothing as Santa Cruz continued fighting out of the southpaw stance, controlling the action with right and left uppercuts that were clearly hurting his opponent.

Diaz showed guts, however, still trying to come forward even though he was getting hit flush on the chin. His right eye was cut and swelling up by the sixth, and it looked as though Santa Cruz was ready to finish off Diaz.

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Diaz comes from way back to stop Santa Cruz

From rounds six through nine, Santa Cruz was in total control, repeatedly landing the straight left and the right uppercut. His foe's face was a mess going into the 10th. It was going to take a miracle for Diaz to win.

Midway through the 10th, that's exactly what we witnessed. Santa Cruz threw a lazy right hand and Diaz countered with a left uppercut, catching Santa Cruz, 23-2 (13), on the chin and dropping him to the canvas. He unsteadily got to his feet, but Diaz immediately jumped on him and landed a flurry of shots that sent him down for the second time. He got up again, but Diaz seized the opportunity by landing a few more punches, prompting referee Richard Steele (USA) to step in and stop the fight at 2:26 of round 10.

It was an amazing turnaround for Diaz, 32-1-1 (17), as he was well behind (by five, five, and three points) on the scorecards. With this win, he joined Juan Diaz and Julio Diaz as the third fighter in the lightweight division to hold a version of a "major" title with the Diaz surname.

Television: **HBO Pay-Per-View**
Promoter: **Top Rank**
(8-12-06)
Wayne McCullough

Humberto Soto KO 4 Ivan Valle

Las Vegas, Nevada: Since beating Rocky Juarez in August 2005, Soto hadn't found any appealing opportunities at featherweight, so he stepped up in weight to the super featherweight limit to face Valle underneath Maskaev-Rahman at the Thomas & Mack Center, hoping to eventually get a bigger fight in this talent-packed weight class. The first few seconds of his 130-pound adventure didn't go well for Soto, but that was it for Valle, as Soto quickly took over and knocked Valle down multiple times on his way to a fourth-round TKO victory.

Valle, 129½, Los Mochis, Mexico, was slightly taller than Soto, 130, also from Los Mochis, but had a shorter reach. Mere moments into the bout, Valle connected with a left hook to Soto's chin and moved in to try to take advantage. But he left his own chin exposed and Soto, 130, countered with a left hook and a straight right hand that caught Valle flush, sending him to the canvas.

As Valle got to his feet, he got a bit of good news when he and everyone else noticed that Soto was bleeding over his left eye. But bad news soon followed for Valle, as referee Joe Cortez (USA) deducted a point from Valle for a low blow after warning him at the start of the second round.

Going into the third round, Valle, 26, was already down four points. It got worse for him as he grew desperate. He rushed in and left himself open, allowing Soto, 26, to land a right forearm to the back of his head, putting him on the canvas again. He got to his feet and complained to the referee, but Soto was all over him once more. He put Valle down with what looked like a low blow, but he wasn't warned for it. Soto then caught Valle with a left hook to the back of the head, sending him down for the third knockdown of the round. Valle got to his feet and was able to survive until the bell.

Valle, 25-5-1 (21), had never been stopped in any of his previous losses, but early in the fourth, Soto landed a right hand followed by a right uppercut under Valle's left jab, forcing the stoppage at 0:42. Valle was way behind on all three scorecards after only three rounds fought.

Soto, 40-5-2 (24), said afterward, "I am ready to fight anybody at 130 pounds. I am ready to fight the winner of Barrera vs. Juarez or the winner of Morales vs. Pacquiao. I hope one of them steps up to fight me."

Television: **HBO Pay-Per-View**
Promoter: **Top Rank**
(8-12-06)
Wayne McCullough ■

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[New Faces]

(Continued from Page 28)

Providence didn't shine on him for long. The law eventually caught up with Ayala, and at one point he found himself staring at a lengthy jail sentence, which he managed to plead down to probation. Additional brushes with the law and the birth of his daughter, Hennessy, convinced Ayala that hustling on the Reading streets, often with his daughter in tow, wasn't the best way to escape the hard existence he was leading. So he relocated to New Haven, Connecticut, and started working out at Ring One Gym.

It was a positive step to be sure, but finding someone to guide him in the ring and the gym proved tougher than he anticipated. Ayala set his sights on local super bantamweight Luis Rosa, who also worked out at Ring One. At 30, Rosa wasn't ready to trade in his gloves for a spit bucket quite yet. But he did offer to set Ayala up with former Mexican welterweight contender Gaspar Ortega, who had more than 175 fights between 1953 and 1965. Ortega, who in retirement occasionally trains fighters in New Haven, liked what he saw. Ayala respected Gaspar, but he still wanted to be trained by Rosa, whom he regularly sought out in the gym for advice.

"People would ask me, 'Who's your trainer?' and I'd say, 'Ask him [pointing to Rosa].' Then somebody'd ask Luis, 'Is he your fighter?' and he'd say, 'I don't know, ask him.'" Plus, Elizabeth had some very clear ideas on who should train her son.

"When I went to Elvin's house, his mother came out, pointed at me and said 'You're going to train Elvin," Rosa remembers.

As the months rolled by and the bond between Ayala and Rosa strengthened, Rosa be-

came Ayala's de facto trainer, though neither man would go on record and make it official.

Both men will, however, insist that God brought them together. More secular students of the fight game would say that Ayala's uncanny instincts, the ability to think on his feet, and a smooth-as-silk gift for slipping punches were more responsible for his rise than anything else.

"I knew he was ready," said Rosa. "I told him a lot of people will say it's too soon, but now's the time, believe me. I felt this way because Elvin was well-schooled. In two years, I taught him everything I learned in 10."

Ayala had no reason to doubt the man he'd trusted on boxing matters for so long, and neither did Michael Gutrick, whom Ayala decisioned in his pro debut, a four-rounder in Toms River, New Jersey.

Though he was admittedly raw, Ayala outboxed Gutrick, disposed of his next opponent, Darius Hunter at 2:40 of round one, and then peeled off five straight unanimous decisions.

As pleased as they were with Ayala's performances, Rosa, Ortega, and Allen Hadelman, his manager, detected what they considered to be the beginnings of a dangerous trend for Ayala: He wasn't finishing off opponents quickly enough.

"We wanted Elvin to start unleashing more power," Rosa said. "There was nothing wrong with him boxing an opponent, but he had to learn to take him out when the time came. He had the power to do it, he always has."

Ayala, who was just as confident in his one-punch power as he was in his technical skills, simply liked hitting without getting hit. Therefore, he sometimes didn't commit to delivering the finishing blow soon enough.

Yet, after getting tagged by Julio Jean in a 2004 six-rounder that should've ended earlier than it did, Ayala started taking his corner's instructions to heart, and won six of his next nine fights by kayo.

Hadelman, as well as Ayala's co-promoters J Russell Peltz and Rich Cappiello, expect that stepping up the level of his competition (Hadelman says Ayala would fight *Contender* alums Sergio Mora or Peter Manfredo tomorrow) will force Ayala to turn loose the dynamite in his fists even more regularly.

That's why, according to Hadelman and Peltz, pitting Ayala against tougher foes in higher-profile bouts is the number-one goal at this point in the 25-year-old's career.

"Right now, Elvin's still a little green, and he's still learning his craft," Peltz said. "But he has all the tools to become a serious contender. He's ready to take the next step."

Rosa, however, takes a bolder and longer-term view, saying, "I think he'll be holding some version of the middleweight title by mid-2007, definitely."

Hadelman concurs: "The kid's special, no doubt about it. But he has to stay focused." As the self-made real estate magnate knows from first-hand experience, the spoils of success can be distracting. "When you go from having nothing, like Elvin did," said Hadelman, "to suddenly having prosperity, it's easy to get swept up in success. But he's a humble kid. I think he'll stay focused."

Hadelman just may be right about Elvin Ayala. After all, according to the fighter, someone up there is looking out for him. ■

Frank Krewda is a Philadelphia-based freelance writer.

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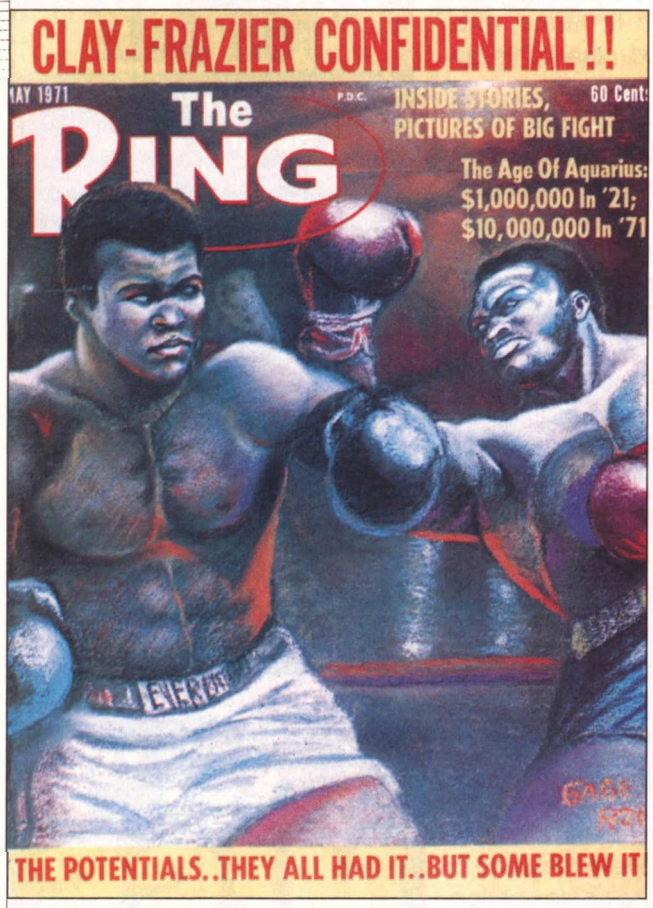
May 1971



COVER STORY: "Frazier-Ali Confidential" is Associate Editor Dan Daniel's analysis of "The Fight Of The Century" in which Joe Frazier decisioned Muhammad Ali at New York's Madison Square Garden on March 8, 1971.

World Champions

(for period ending March 15, 1971)
Heavyweight: Joe Frazier
Light Heavyweight: Bob Foster
Middleweight: Carlos Monzon
Welterweight: Billy Backus
Junior Welterweight: Nicolino Loche
Lightweight: Ken Buchanan
Junior Lightweight: Hiroshi Kobayashi
Featherweight: Kuniaki Shibata
Bantamweight: Chucho Castillo
Flyweight: Erbito Salvarria

Many questions remained about Frazier's unanimous victory, sealed when he floored Ali with a left hook in the 15th round. For example, could Ali have escaped defeat at his peak in 1967, before his exile from the ring? THE RING at the time concluded the answer to be no, since Ali threw many punches, but at no time had Frazier hurt or in trouble. This was supposed to be further proof, according to those at ringside, that Ali would not have beaten Frazier in Ali's prime. Daniel also noted that the uppercut, one of Ali's primary weapons when he was heavyweight champion of the world, was missing in the Frazier fight.

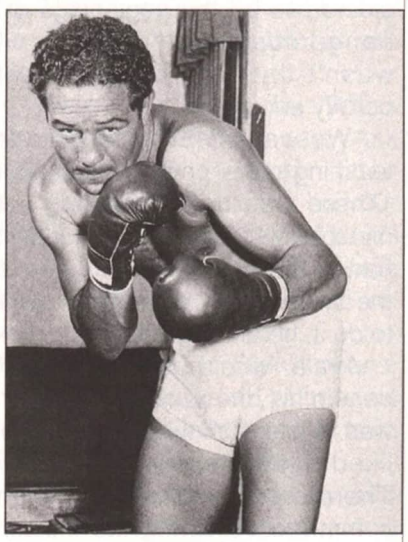
Some observers found it curious that Frazier decided to switch from a body attack to seeking out headshots after the fourth round. Frazier had been very effective going to the body, but opted to switch to the head because "I told him to," said Yank Durham, the heavyweight champion's trainer/manager. When pressed, Durham didn't expound any more on that answer.

Observers also found that Ali turned in a better performance than many had expected. On Daniel's scorecards, Ali won six rounds, to Frazier's nine. Ali also dispelled any doubts about his ability to take a punch by getting up from Frazier's 15th-round bomb.

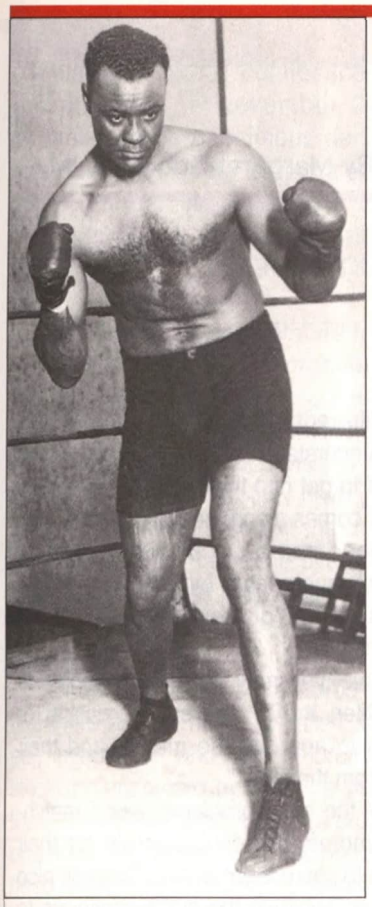
Each fighter received $2.5-million for their effort, huge money for '71. A rematch between the two was also broached, with a possible venue being the Forum, in Inglewood, California, which was owned by Jack Kent Cooke. Cooke made the Frazier-Ali fight possible by becoming a partner with the Garden and guaranteeing $4.5-million of the $5-million promised to the fighters.

Frazier's victory gave fight fans a new appreciation for "Smokin' Joe," who had established himself as the best heavyweight in the world, with possibly the only threat coming from a young undefeated Olympic gold medalist being nursed along carefully—George Foreman.

"Potential: It Makes Some People Wince" by Nat Loubet discussed heavyweight champions and contenders who had a habit of sitting on their laurels or neglecting



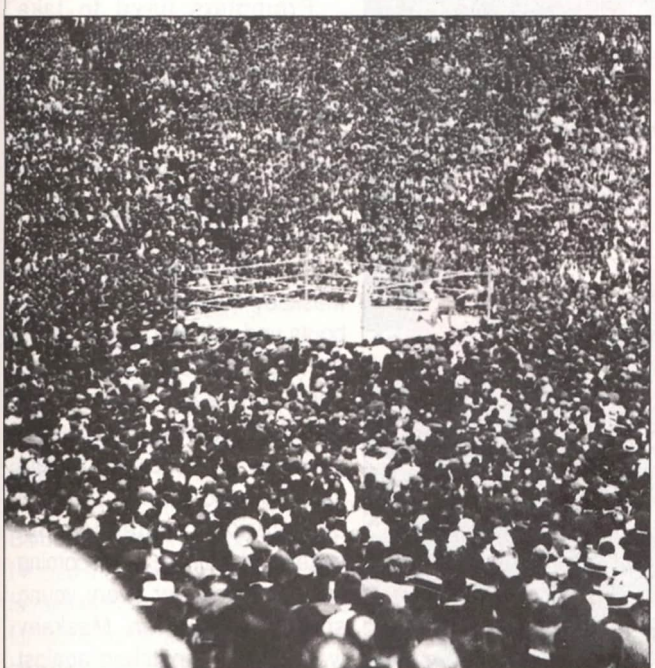
Max Baer never lived up to his potential



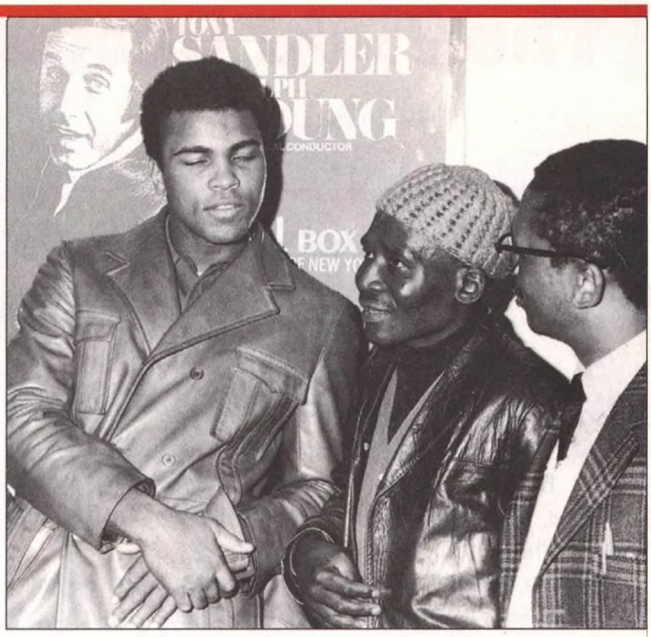
Heavyweight Harry Wills was denied a title shot because he was black

to work on all aspects of their game. Laziness and being rushed are two of the reasons given for fighters failing to develop their full potential. Former heavyweight champion Max Baer is cited as a prime example. Baer pounded Primo Carnera for the world crown, but lost it to 10-1 underdog Jimmy Braddock in his first defense. "A heavyweight can have fun for three years before it really shows," claimed Baer, which pretty much summed up the attitude that led to his brief reign.

"The Ring Begins Golden Year" by Ted Carroll celebrated the 50-year existence of THE RING. During that time, the publication had seen and documented many social changes in the United States, such as two African-American fighters being paid $5-million for a boxing match. Carroll recalled the time when "white supremacy" ruled the land and heavyweight contenders such as Harry Wills were denied title shots based on race.



Dempsey and Carpentier generated boxing's first million-dollar fight



Anthony Morodi meets Muhammad Ali upon his arrival in the U.S.

"50 Years Since First Million-Dollar Gate" by Jersey Jones recalled the first million-dollar fight, between heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey and Georges Carpentier, on July 2, 1921. The fight in Jersey City, New Jersey, drew 80,183 fans and generated $1,789,000 in revenue. It ushered in boxing as big business. Fifty years later, the Frazier-Ali fight at Madison Square Garden attracted approximately $10-million, which included not only box-office sales but also revenue from closed-circuit TV. The big business of boxing had become bigger business.

"Blue Jaguar Morodi Eyes Title" by Dave Spillane introduced South African lightweight Anthony Morodi, who thought he was escaping from his country's apartheid laws, which prevented blacks from fighting whites, to fight in the United States. He was hailed as a modern Henry Armstrong, but never fought in the U.S., and after boxing in Australia, he returned to South Africa, where he fought on until 1978.

"So. Cal's Come A Long Way From Naud Junction To Inglewood" by Don Fraser looked into how professional boxing evolved in the Southern California area, starting at a place called "Naud Junction," back in the 1890s. The venue was located in what is today downtown Los Angeles, which was just a budding city at the turn of the 20th century. Naud, however, was a popular enough venue to attract heavyweight champion Jim Jefferies and, in the early-1900s, Jack Johnson. As Los Angeles grew, so too did boxing. By the late-1940s, the Olympic and Hollywood Legions were playing to sellout crowds every week. Southern California also gave fighters like Henry Armstrong, Archie Moore, and Abe Attell a chance to build fan bases. ■

By Margaret Goodman, M.D.

Mismatches: Why They Happen And The Dangers Involved

A mismatch, in some ways, is like pornography. It is difficult to define, but we all know it when we see it.

"A mismatch," wrote boxing journalist Thomas Hauser, "is a fight in which the skill level and physical attributes of the fighters are such that it's more of a public sacrifice than a competitive sporting event."

Ron Scott Stevens, a matchmaker for more than 20 years and now head of the New York State Athlete Commission, may have the best perspective of all, saying: "When a match shocks the conscience of the commission going in, then the fight isn't going to be competitive."

The job of the matchmaker is a complicated one and that is why so few do it well. Bobby Goodman, vice president of boxing operations for Don King Productions, became a licensed matchmaker in the 1950s.

"A matchmaker has to be a fan first," said Goodman. "He must love to see a good fight, know the styles of all the fighters, their weaknesses and ambitions, what type of amateur background they have, and what is their confidence level."

The matchmaker is most responsible for bringing along a fighter's career. He can ruin a fighter by putting him in too tough too early, or baby him to the point where he's not advancing.

"Each fighter has a different preparedness level," said Goodman. "It is my job to understand that. If my kid has never fought a southpaw, I need to get him that experience so that when a big fight eventually comes along, he will be ready."

Both Stevens and Goodman have shown that good matchmaking is an instinct, augmented by vast knowledge. Unfortunately, sometimes a show of great matches can be made, but there is no interest.

"Depending on the venue, you may have more people to satisfy," notes Stevens. "Often, the TV network, the casino, or the local ticket-seller has to approve the match, and their interests can be different from the fans'."

Most agree that one of the main problems facing matchmaking is that many promoters are so desperate for their fighters to win, they refuse to place them at risk. Stevens also believes that boxing suffers because the sport continues to destroy the opponent pool without taking time to rehabilitate it. No one is thinking long term. A 3-0 boxer garners a few losses and becomes 3-2. He is labeled an opponent, and before you know it, he is 7-8. His die is cast. He is matched too tough, and, after a few more fights, he may have slurred speech and poor balance in only his mid-20s.

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Maskaev is a perfect example of how a losing fighter can be rebuilt

Promoters need to take some of the regular losers and start putting them in fights they have a reasonable chance of winning. Stevens points to the brilliant rehabilitation of heavyweight Oleg Maskaev as an example.

In 2000, at the age of 31, Maskaev had won 21 of 24 pro bouts and seemed on his way to a major title and big money. Then came a trio of kayo losses to Kirk Johnson, Lance Whitaker, and Corey Sanders that appeared to finish Maskaev as a serious contender. But instead of quitting or becoming cannon fodder for every young stud in the division, Maskaev was carefully matched against mediocre opponents, which

gradually rebuilt his confidence and record. Then, in November 2005, Maskaev won a unanimous decision over Sinan Samil Sam to earn a shot at WBC titleholder Hasim Rahman, and in August 2006, the 37-year-old Maskaev beat Rahman via 12th-round TKO to claim the belt.

Unfortunately, few fighters are reconstructed in the same manner as Maskaev, which leaves us to ask who is most to blame for flagrant mismatches.

Virtually all promoters wish to drive the career of the fighter they have under contract *and* make a decent match. But some go way too far in the direction of protecting the house fighters, and all too often commissions choose to look the other way.

Goodman believes another problem is that there are too many so-called "bookers," middlemen who help the promoters stock the undercard by lining up opponents. Goodman notes that, "Too often these guys just produce pieces of meat. It is one sector of our business that needs to be licensed, and they need to be held accountable. Sometimes these guys want to be paid more than the fighters for just making a phone call."

PHOTO BY PAUL J. RICHARDS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Like boxers, racehorses such as Barbaro, are often seriously injured

Stevens, to the contrary, thinks that booking agents are necessary because "a matchmaker doesn't know everyone."

Stevens, however, believes a commission must be able to defend a match it approves. "How do you defend it if a 4-7 fighter is hurt against an 8-0 fighter?" he asked. "I often call and speak to the trainers, document whom I spoke to, and may even get an affidavit from the manager."

Yes, at the end of the day, I must agree with Hauser that, "The ultimate responsibility for mismatches lies with the governing state [or Native American] athletic commission, which should not allow them to take place."

An Eerie Coincidence

Risk factors for athlete fatalities:

- Undisclosed injuries
- Competing too often
- Lengthy competitions
- Competing when fatigued
- Starting a career too early, before reaching maturity
- Too little time between competitions

At first glance, the above list appears to relate to boxing fatalities. Think again!

Following the tragic injury to Kentucky Derby winner, Barbaro, during the second leg of the Triple Crown on May 20, I hoped the racing community would look within itself to search for answers to improve safety. Horseracing has a diminishing fan base, partially because of injuries. Just as it tears at our hearts to see a boxer collapse during a fight, seeing a thoroughbred suffer a devastating injury produces an equivalent visceral reaction among horseracing fans.

SI.com (*Sports Illustrated*'s Web site) recently explored the day that Barbaro was injured with Michael Matz, three-time Olympic equestrian and trainer of Barbaro. "Maybe I had him too ready that day. I don't think I made a mistake," said Matz. "But when something like this happens, you second guess yourself. It's only human."

Most who work in boxing, along with Matz and the owners of Barbaro, are decent people. Even so, during the summer of 2006, 26 horses died at Chicago's Arlington Park and seven at Southern California's Del Mar Race Track. Sadly, boxing is not much better. No one really knows how many boxing deaths there have been over the years, let alone the number of career-ending injuries.

In horseracing and boxing, obligatory remarks, such as "this is just a part of the sport," serve as mantras for those who refuse to make the necessary changes. Some opt to hide their heads in the sand because they fear changes might document that they were doing an inadequate job or, horror of horrors, increase expenses. Just as there are periodic calls to ban boxing, some believe racing is animal abuse and must be phased out.

The August 27, 2006, issue of *The New York Times* reported that "Comprehensive national statistics on thoroughbred breakdowns are more elusive than Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction." And as Governor George Pataki considered bids to run the state's multibillion-dollar racetracks, *The Times* urged New York to support a national database.

The Times added, "But the real scandal in thoroughbred racing is that the people controlling the game don't want to know." Sound familiar, boxing fans? Both boxing and horseracing need to wake up, make the changes, and emulate NASCAR's continued advancement of safety measures. ■

Come Out Writing

Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Send your comments to Come Out Writing, THE RING, P.O. Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034.

Or e-mail letters to comeoutwriting@yahoo.com. E-mailed letters will include the writer's e-mail address unless a city and state of origin is provided.

Done Deal

After watching "The Real Deal's" latest comeback on FSN, I couldn't help but feel disgusted by the state of the heavyweight division and by the TV broadcast team. Holyfield has always been a true warrior and given boxing many memorial nights, but that was then and now is now. Listening to the announcers fawn over Evander like he was still in his prime made me feel like they thought I was stupid. Holyfield was fighting nothing more than a club fighter, so the win really didn't mean anything. Anybody who follows boxing knows Evander no longer has the capability to becoming a champion again. Holyfield's will and guts cannot be doubted, but his ability and body will betray him. The real deal has already been dealt, so let's just hope Holyfield doesn't suffer terrible consequences as a result of his latest comeback.

RICKY FLANAGAN,
House Springs, MO

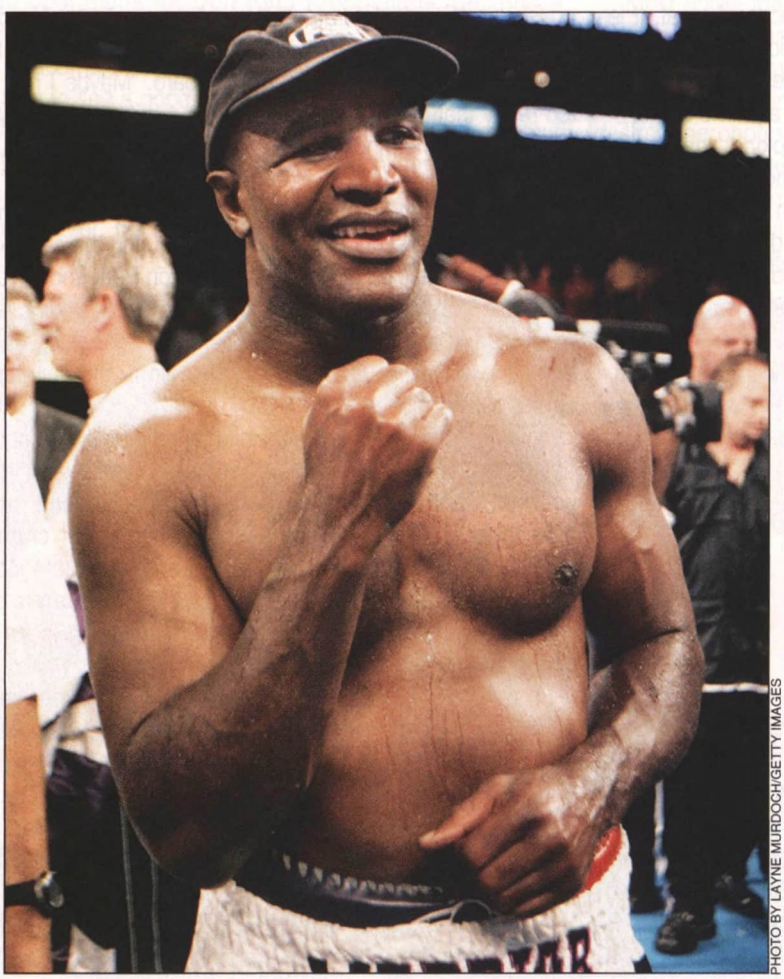


PHOTO BY LAYNE MURDOCH/GETTY IMAGES

Evander Holyfield enjoys the moment shortly after stopping Jeremy Bates in Dallas, Texas. Reader and Holyfield fan Ricky Flanagan writes to say he hopes that Evander doesn't suffer any serious injury by fighting on way past his prime.

No More Nady

Nevada referee Jay Nady has proven that he is incompetent. Far too many times, his nit picking, unnecessary interventions, and constant jabbering impacts the outcome of the fight. Recently, he issued far too many unnecessary warnings for holding in the heavyweight encounter between Oleg Maskaev and James Toney. Nady is obviously unable to discern the difference between holding and clinching, a normal tactic in boxing, especially with heavyweights.

Bottom line: A good referee should go unnoticed, with little if any talking to the boxers, and, barring blatant fouls, should in no way influence the outcome of the fight. Nady fails on all of these counts and in essence becomes one of the participants. I say limit his ring presence to four-rounders or better yet, revoke his license.

DR. ED MARTIN
Asheville, N.C.

Thanks For The Memories

I greatly enjoyed the November 2006 RING DOUBLE's celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Leonard-Hearns superfight. Those who were too young to remember it simply have no idea how much excitement the bout generated. Even though the match took place during an era when *Sports Illustrated* routinely featured boxers on its cover, when boxing was free on network TV many weekends throughout the year, and when boxers were nationally recognized in commercial endorsements for non-

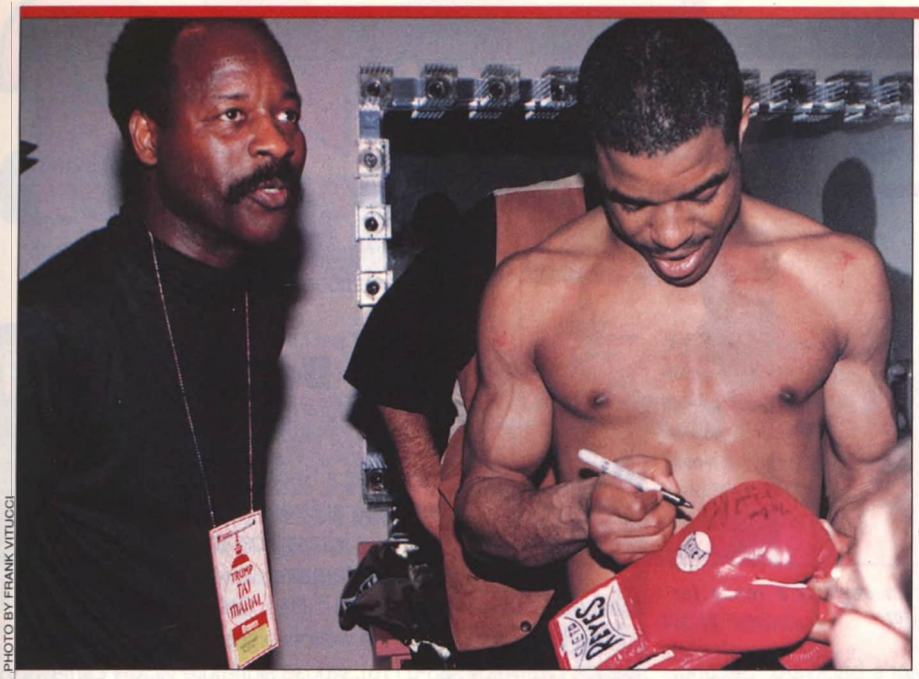


PHOTO BY FRANK VITUCCI

David Reid sings a glove for a young fan following his pro debut in 1997, as his trainer, Al Mitchell, looks on. Reader Phil Day writes to inquire what happened to "The American Dream."

boxing products, the hype surrounding the fight took the sport to a whole other stratosphere. The local Chicago *Ten O'Clock News* started its broadcast with coverage of the fight; not just the sports segment, mind you, but it was the lead story for the night! I think it's safe to assume we'll never see the day again when a boxing match is awarded such national prominence. The fact that the match more than lived up to the anticipation only solidifies its place as one of the greatest fights, if not sporting events in history.

Jeff Ryan's interview with Sugar Ray Leonard was also excellent. Ryan asked all the right questions (I've often wondered what was going through Leonard's mind after he witnessed Hearns' incredible destruction of Cuevas) and Leonard still knows how to phrase a response in a way that not so subtlety portrays him as the legend he is. And it was the dramatic knockout of Hearns, of course, that earned him the right to do so.

MIKE DUGO
Lombard, IL

I greatly enjoyed your special section remembering the 1981 Leonard-Hearns fight. That event was one of the very few times when a match captured fans' attention to such an intense degree.

I would, however, like to set the record straight on one point: In William Dettloff's insightful article, "Leonard-Hearns Revisited," he refers to the 1991 Terry Norris-Leonard fight as a "kayo loss" for Sugar Ray. In fact, Norris won by a lopsided decision, flooring Leonard twice, but then, to his credit, he appeared to hold back his attack to spare a great champion the indignity of a knockout loss.

JEFFREY COLLINS
Montreal, Quebec

UFC vs. Boxing

I just read that Ultimate Fighting Championship President Dana White's comment that Mike Tyson would get destroyed in the UFC. Tyson is 40 years old and well past his prime, but could still take out anyone in the UFC with one left hook. If the UFC fighters were any good they would be earning big bucks boxing, instead of rolling around the floor slapping and grabbing each other. Any half-decent puncher would beat any UFC champion with ease.

VINNIE BOWERS
Sunderland England

What Happened To "The American Dream"?

I have recently come across some David "The American Dream" Reid boxing merchandise, and it really got me wondering what happened to Reid. I hope THE RING can enlighten me.

PHIL DAY
Kenley, England

Editor's note: Reid retired after his ninth-round kayo loss to Sam Hill, on November 11, 2001. Reid now helps his mentor and former trainer, Al Mitchell, train amateur boxers at the U.S. Olympic Training Center at Northern Michigan University.

Tribute To "El Feroz"

We should all tip our hats to Fernando Vargas, one of the greatest warriors of his era. This is a man who gave his all each time he stepped into the ring, and even if you argue that he came up a little short in some of the big fights, you can't deny that "Ferocious Fernando" always gave everything he had.

OLLEN COLLETT
Salyersville, KY

Adamant About Adamek

I have been reading THE RING and it's sister publication's for over 25 years. In that time you have covered pretty much all of my favorite fighters. The only one you missed the boat on was Dariusz Michalczewski. That's why I am writing to request that you do not ignore Tomasz Adamek. I had the privilege of seeing him in action against Paul Briggs and Thomas Ulrich, and was very impressed. He has all the technical skills as well as good power and toughness. Moreover, he's very exciting.

I know you just covered Zsolt Erdei, which I was very glad to see especially since I'm part Hungarian, but Adamek is by far a much better and more exciting fighter. I hope to see an in-depth story on him in the near future, along with the likes of other Eastern Europeans such as Sergei Dzindziruk.

BOB UNGUREAN
rhungarian@aol.com ■

[Looking Ahead]

By Joe Santoliquito

Ouma Relishes His Underdog Role Against Taylor

PHOTO BY MICHAEL W. HEAYN

Ouma says he's ready for Taylor

The odds will be stacked against **Kassim Ouma**, when the former IBF junior middleweight titlist challenges world middleweight champion **Jermain Taylor**, December 9, on HBO's *Championship Boxing*. First, the fight is taking place at the Alltell Arena, in Little Rock, Arkansas, Taylor's backyard. Second, Ouma will be the much smaller fighter, lacking Taylor's power and reach.

The thing is, Ouma likes the long odds.

"I love it when people say I can't beat this guy or that guy," said Ouma in his singsong Ugandan accent. "I'm going to shock the world against Taylor. Give me a minute, I'll shock the world. I know there are a lot of people who think I can't beat this guy. Jermain is champion of the world; I give him credit for that. But I think I'll be stronger at 160."

Nor does Ouma have a problem fighting the homegrown champ in Little Rock.

"I'm going to beat him, beat the judges, beat everyone, I don't care where the fight is," Ouma said "He's bigger, but I believe anyone can hurt anyone."

Ouma, 25-2-1 (15), certainly has a believer in his co-promoter, Hall of Famer **J Russell Peltz**.

"Kassim does well in fights where no one thinks he can win," Peltz pointed out. "We don't need any more high-risk, low-reward fights like when we fought **Sechew Powell**. Kassim's career has been full of fights like that.

"This is a reward financially, and it's a reward status wise. Kassim doesn't think anyone can beat him, so he has the right attitude. There is a size difference, but I've never been a big believer that size alone wins fights. We'll see if size really matters. I can give you plenty of examples of small guys knocking out big guys in their own backyards. Boxing is filled with champions who couldn't break an egg. But this is a fight I give Taylor credit for taking."

The question is whether or not Ouma can get inside Taylor's jab. Peltz said that Ouma has the better skills, maintaining that Taylor, 25-0-1 (17), isn't exactly a finished product.

"I don't think Taylor can outbox Kassim," Peltz said. "It's all about whether or not the fight will be fought on the inside or the outside."

Peltz also said that Ouma has a better chance of beating Taylor than **Winky Wright** does—well, on this night anyway. "Kassim," he noted, "will be in the ring with Taylor December 9, and Winky will be watching on TV."

Welter Double Dip

A week before the Ouma-Taylor showdown, **Antonio Margarito** and **Miguel Cotto** will engage in a Showtime doubleheader on December 2, at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City. Neither fight will be an easy one for the headliners. Margarito, 33-4 (24), is scheduled to take on **Joshua Clottey**, 29-1 (18). Cotto, 27-0 (22), makes his first foray into the welterweight division against **Carlos Quintana**, 23-0 (18), whose signature victory came in a 12-round unanimous decision over previously undefeated **Joel Julio** on June 24. Since no 147-pounder of note seems to want to fight Margarito and Cotto wants to make a name for himself at welterweight, maybe this is Top Rank's way of building a blockbuster between two of their best fighters. It's obviously an easy fight to make, with the Margarito-Cotto winner to face off against the **Floyd Mayweather-Carlos Baldomir** victor. Stay tuned.

Listen Up

The December 9 Ouma-Taylor date also pushed back junior welterweight champion Ricky Hatton's original HBO January 13 date in Atlanta, Georgia, against IBF titlist Juan Urango, who won the belt with a highly controversial decision over Naoufel Ben Rabah on June 30 ... It looks as if Steve Cunningham, The Ring's number-two rated cruiserweight, will finally get a chance to fight for a title, against Krzysztof Wlodarczk, rated eighth by The Ring, on November 25. The fight will take place on Wlodarczk's home turf, at the Torwar Sport Hall, in Warsaw, Poland. Cunningham will be taking on the Polish fighter for the IBF title, vacated by cruiserweight world champion O'Neil Bell, whose IBF mandatory was supposed to be Cunningham. ■

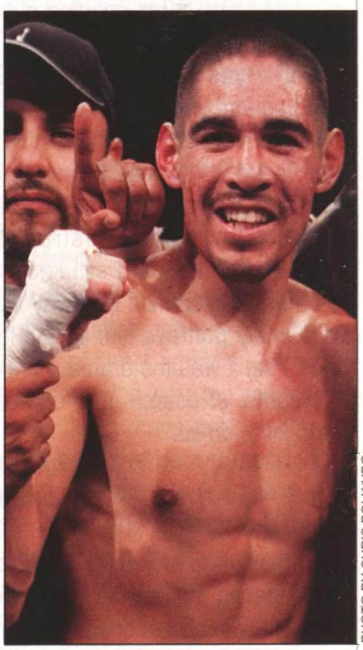


PHOTO BY CHRIS POLK/HBO

Margarito will headline a December doubleheader with Cotto

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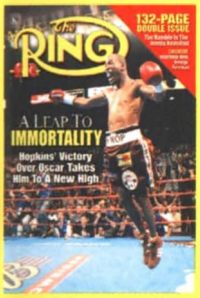

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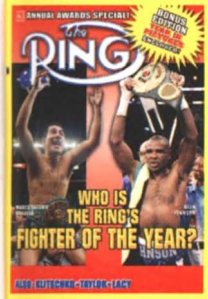

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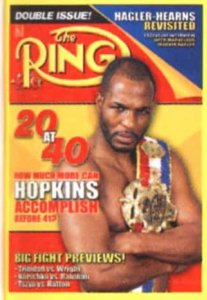

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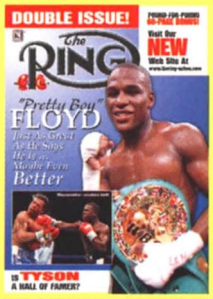

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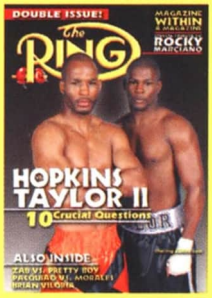

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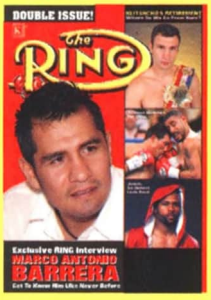

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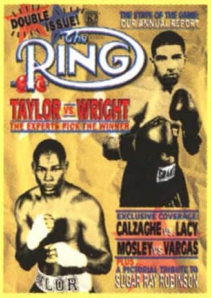

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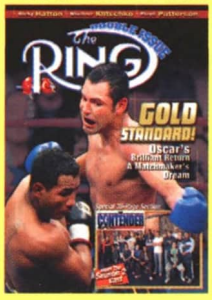

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